



Understanding Dyslexia

**Implications of the identification of and Support for Children
with Dyslexia in Kuwaiti Primary Schools**

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I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified with appropriate acknowledgement and referencing and I also certify that no material is included for which a degree has previously been conferred upon me.

Abstract

This is an exploratory study about understandings of dyslexia in primary schools in Kuwait. The study aims to find out how dyslexia is conceptualised in the Kuwaiti educational system and explore the implications of these understandings in terms of the identification of and support provided for children with dyslexia. The study investigates current practices in Kuwait to reflect the perceptions of the various people involved in this system, namely school staff (teachers, headteachers and school psychologists), students, and parents. It applies a variety of methods to explore participants' perceptions and school practices. Furthermore, the study attempts to identify the influences of such understandings in developing 'dyslexia-friendly' practice and the barriers holding it back. The findings have posed some challenges for implementing inclusion for children with dyslexia in Kuwait. These challenges are mainly related to the educational context in Kuwait generally and the different actors involved in supporting dyslexic children, such as teachers, parents and schools.

The study revealed an absence of those children from government and school policies. Participants had different understandings and interpretations about dyslexia. Their responses highlighted the complexity surrounding dyslexia as a concept and the lack of awareness on the part of people involved in the Kuwaiti educational system about children with dyslexia. The findings also displayed limitations stemming from the policy and cultural contexts, which impact the timing of identification. There is no clear policy targeted towards the early identification of children with learning difficulties/dyslexia; as a result of this an early intervention strategy is yet to be created for primary education.

The findings further underlined the inclusive schools' poor performance in accommodating children with dyslexia. On the other hand, Model schools are actually 'segregated schools' which kept children with learning difficulties generally and dyslexia in particular in

specialised schools. The dilemma is hence represented between insufficient provision in the inclusive schools and the stigma of studying in a special school for learning difficulties, which in turn is aggravated by poor societal awareness. Participants had differing personal concepts of inclusion, which highlights the uncertainty about the implication of inclusion and the capability of the schools in the current provision to meet the needs of children with dyslexia.

The study thus implies that there is an urgent and real need to implement a holistic framework for children with dyslexia using knowledge of the local context in Kuwait as well as benefiting from the international literature, research, and experiences in this respect. Such international experiences should not neglect the Kuwaiti context, however. In other words, it should benefit from international success with regards to dyslexia, but implement changes in the context of the country to successfully adopt culturally appropriate dyslexia-friendly practices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This introduction presents the wider background of this research, along with the study's context. Subsequently, the research aims and questions that have informed the direction of the research will be presented. Following this, the section moves on to discuss the study's significance. This section aims to lay the groundwork for exploring the understanding of dyslexia in the State of Kuwait.

1.2 Context of the study

1.2.1 Focus of the research

This study explores the understanding of the concept of dyslexia in Kuwait. The purpose of the study is to shed light on the current practices for identification, support, and inclusion of dyslexia in Kuwait from different angles, reflecting the perceptions and experiences of teachers, students, and parents in primary mainstream school practice. This study also evaluates government and school level policies, or lack thereof. The search is not for 'good practice' in itself; rather, the study explores the practice/experiences of including students with dyslexia in mainstream primary schools in Kuwait. In doing this, the aim is to present recommendations to improve practice within the Kuwaiti public education establishment. Since the concept of inclusion is relatively new in Kuwait, my expectation was that there would be a great divergence of understandings, and a probable lack of policies. The lack of any unanimous understanding of dyslexia worldwide, with ongoing debates on how to approach it, are possibly an indicator of the discord I anticipated finding in Kuwait.

1.2.2 Approach of the study

A case study approach was seen to be the most appropriate for the research and the most likely to gather both broad and detailed information on mainstream school practice in the support and inclusion of children with dyslexia. Chapter 3 gives a detailed justification of the suitability of the case study design for the research.

1.2.3 Anticipated challenges

It was thought that this study may face several challenges specific to the context of a developing nation attempting to improve dyslexia provision from a relatively modest starting point. One potential challenge to conducting this study is the lack of comprehensive and unanimous understanding of Dyslexia in Kuwait. In Kuwait, in contrast with the UK, there is no consensus on a definition of dyslexia (Ng, 1996). The lack of a unified understanding could be a difficulty as it impedes the clear definition of the group being surveyed. One of the factors contributing to the confusion about dyslexia is that definitions were copied almost as-is from the British definitions as discussed further in Chapter 2. The problem with employing a copy-paste attitude is that it means that such definitions lack the wealth of experience and trial and error made by the other countries to reach these definitions. This will lead to inappropriately adapted policies that don't properly conform to the nuances of society. It also reflects a generally lazy approach to solving a complex problem which was evident in the attitudes of the parties involved. 'Dyslexia' is not a frequently used term in Kuwait. On the other hand, the terminology used to describe dyslexia in Kuwait is 'learning difficulty' or the Arabic *عسر القراءة*, which can be literally translated as 'difficulty of reading'. These problems largely manifest themselves in the domains

of reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics. A stark contrast between a strong capacity for oral expression and poor results on written tasks often acts as an indication of the presence of dyslexia. In Europe, the term 'dyslexia' is more accepted and used by people with dyslexia and their families (European Dyslexia Association/EDA, 2009), whereas professionals prefer to employ the term 'specific learning difficulties' (Riddick, 1996). Terminology in Kuwait does not seem to follow such a pattern, however, as the term 'dyslexia' itself is rarely used.

A wider issue that may impact this study is the general lack of public awareness in Kuwait and other Gulf countries about the nature of dyslexia (Aladwani& Al Shaye, 2012). This means that interviews with parents and students themselves may require an approach that accounts for the interviewees' relative unfamiliarity with the subject matter. Furthermore, understanding of specific dyslexia related concepts such as inclusion is likely to be limited, and hence many participants to the study may be hostile to or even supportive of inclusion without sufficient reason, impeding a true understanding of public sentiment towards the issue. In Kuwait, any difficulties in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling may be categorised into one group as "learning difficulties", and that the responsibility for dealing with any difficulty should fall on the shoulders of the individual child or person (Macdonald,2009). Another constraint in the region is that education professionals and psychologists lack standardised criteria to aid them in the diagnosis and assessment of dyslexia (Almaazmi,2013). This means that the current study may encounter a diverse range of cases, some of which may not fall within the spectrum of dyslexia, but rather general learning difficulties. Research development in Kuwait in the field of dyslexia is still at an early stage, and seems to be somewhat overlooked, resulting in a lack

of literature specifically discussing dyslexia in the country, meaning that literature from other countries in the region may be needed as well as combining multiple Kuwaiti sources that partly address the issue. The more general lack of research surrounding how Arabic speakers are impacted by dyslexia means there may be insufficient guidance for interventions (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Farran, 2010).

1.2.4 Rationale for the study

Children with dyslexia in schools often go unnoticed, because dyslexia does not have external signs to identify the issue, which has contributed to the problem of confusion and misunderstanding (Shaywitz, 2003), especially in developing countries such as Kuwait. No specific studies have analysed the situation of children with dyslexia in mainstream primary schools in Kuwait, so their needs and difficulties are therefore not being addressed, or at least not significantly. The impetus for research in this area has been influenced by two key factors: firstly, personal experience and secondly, the lack of knowledge and expertise in the field of dyslexia in Kuwait and the Gulf region in general.

1.2.5 Personal experience

A few years ago, when I was still living in Kuwait, my son was attending the British School of Kuwait. I received a phone call summoning me to the school, and was informed that my son might be dyslexic, due to the reading difficulty he had exhibited. I was naturally very anxious and spoke to a previous professor of mine, who led special educational needs research at Kuwait University. Her advice was to not pursue this and not even try to get him diagnosed, since unfortunately in Kuwait, there is little in the way of intervention after the diagnosis has been established. This situation is not uncommon in Kuwait, where educators may prefer to turn a blind eye

to such matters rather than engaging in what appears to be a complicated and unknown subject, which appears to be one of the key barriers to identification. The Kuwait Dyslexia Association appeared to serve for publicity purposes more than anything else and did not offer any help in the form of intervention, which serves as another example for an ambitious and well-funded government body that is lacking in expertise and has limited effectiveness in reforming the education system. After moving to the UK and enrolling my son in a school here, he is thankfully being supported and is progressing well for his age. This experience piqued my interest in dyslexia and is the reason I chose to study it. My hope is to one day change how things are done in my country, and to benefit all the students who may need support in this area.

1.3 Purpose of the study

In addition to the previously stated aims of understanding the concept of dyslexia and practice, the study seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of the development of inclusion policy and practice in Kuwait in relation to dyslexia and learning difficulties. This study also aspires to explore the usefulness of dyslexia-friendly concepts and practices for Kuwaiti primary schools. Another aim of this study is to examine the challenges facing Kuwaiti primary schools in implementing policy and practice to support dyslexic students. It is worth pointing out that this study does not seek to define generalizable truths about dyslexia-friendly schools in the Kuwaiti primary context, nor judgements on or evaluation of being 'friendly'; rather, this study aims at exploring participants' understandings and the current provision of dyslexia practices in Kuwaiti primary schools. In doing so, I hope that this study contributes to the ongoing debate about where and how students with dyslexia should be

educated. Ultimately, it is hoped that this study will represent a step forward in understanding dyslexia in general and 'dyslexia-friendly' practice in particular.

Consistent with the aims of the study, the following research questions are posed for investigation:

- 1) How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?
 - a. How do teachers, students, specialists and parents perceive dyslexia?
 - b. How do policies portray dyslexia?
- 2) How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included?
 - a. How are children with dyslexia identified?
 - b. How are children with dyslexia supported?
 - c. How are children with dyslexia included?
 - d. What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices?
- 3) To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools?

1.4 Significance of the study

Having a government committed to implementing inclusive education encouraged me to study the situation in schools undertaking changes in terms of the inclusion of children with dyslexia. It provides a sample of issues both in schools and also in the wider educational climate. I also highlight existing perceptions on dyslexia and examine new provisions in Kuwait, such as Model schools, as a contribution to the growth of inclusive education and supporting pupils with learning difficulties in my country.

This thesis contributes to existing literature in this field by providing insight into the study of Western educational practices in contexts where infrastructure, expertise and awareness is lacking. It is hoped that other researchers from Western universities can benefit from this by understanding the challenges and nuances of studying in such environments and the associated issues with applicability and cultural differences. This study also serves students with dyslexia, as it gives them the chance to talk about their school experiences and have their voices heard. My aspiration is that this study will be able to provide a significant contribution to the debate on dyslexia and 'dyslexia-friendliness' in Kuwait.

Moreover, the project seeks to help teachers gain a deeper understanding of the potential needs of students with dyslexia and it will serve as a guide to benefit future researchers in Kuwait. Ultimately, I hope to contribute to the reduction and removal of barriers for people with dyslexia in society.

1.5 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 is the literature review, which forms the first part of this thesis. This will present the debate surrounding the definition of dyslexia and the perceived importance of early identification. It also discusses the issue of labelling and its effects on the individual who carries the label. It then considers the most discussed models regarding the disability movement and inclusion, as well as the grounds for 'dyslexia-friendly' practices. Following this, it will highlight the Kuwaiti context and finally the Arabic linguistic context.

This will be followed in Chapter 3 by an examination of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for the chosen methodology. The process of data

collection and analysis, including the choice of case study methodology, will be discussed.

In Chapter 4, findings are presented and illustrated via extracts from the data.

Chapter 5 reflects on and discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature

Chapter 6 concludes with an examination of the significance and implications of the findings, makes suggestions for further investigation, and discusses the conclusions to be drawn from the research, together with a reflection on the methods and acknowledgement of the limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview and critical analysis of the literature context of this research inquiry, providing a backdrop of contemporary practice and policy, both in Kuwait and in the wider world, especially in the UK. A further aim is to assess the current research surrounding dyslexia, with the key focus being mainstream schooling in Kuwait.

In reviewing the array of studies into dyslexia, the complexity and diverse opinions that characterise the debate surrounding dyslexia must be emphasised. The ability to provide an all-encompassing literature review is somewhat hindered due to word limit, time constraints and the necessity of focusing on the research questions themselves. This review thus involves topics that pertain to the research questions:

- 1) How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?
- 2) How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included?
- 3) To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools?

The chapter has been organised into four sections, the first presenting an overview of the conceptualisation of dyslexia, moving on to the differing definitions, diagnosis and the controversy surrounding labelling. The chapter goes on to discuss the forms of support provided, along with inclusion and Dyslexia Friendly Schools.

2.2 The concept of dyslexia

Dyslexia encompasses a wide range of different outlooks and interpretations. The complexity of defining dyslexia is exacerbated by differences in opinion over whether to classify it as a learning disability or difficulty. The importance of this distinction lies in the policy and funding mechanisms of governments, among other factors. Pumfrey

and Reason (1991) point out that in the USA, the use of the term 'learning disability' (LD) in the same way as the UK uses 'specific learning difficulties' (SpLD). There is a lack of clarity, however, since the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability' are used to refer to persons with an 'intellectual disability' in some countries (Westwood, 2008). In Kuwait, due to indigenous research surrounding the subject being at a nascent stage, various terms are used, often interchangeably, so a unified term used by all institutions has yet to emerge. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these terms are 'learning difficulty' or 'difficulty of reading'.

Until now, there has still been controversy surrounding a globally accepted definition for dyslexia. Although the research community has been attempting to arrive at a unified definition, the condition continues to be defined vaguely and categorised by specific difficulties in literacy, seen among children with 'normal' intelligence despite the absence of any debilitating neurological conditions (Valdois, 2010). The debate over definition is also on-going in Kuwait, displaying that this study's context is a pertinent example of policy development outside the more well-regulated environments of the West. This adds depth to the problems dyslexia presents and has led some to describe it as a 'hidden' disability (Riddick et al., 2002). Some individuals with dyslexia try to conceal it due to the fear of rejection, while others do not consider dyslexia a problem. Some may hence not even consider dyslexia a disability.

Regardless, in many contexts dyslexia is classified as a disability, so discussing its definition is important.

In Kuwait, a disabled person is defined as anyone who is unable, in whole or in part, to fulfil their average lifestyle needs independently, due to incapacity or failure of

physical or mental faculties (Act no. 49 of 1996 On the Care of the Disabled). Furthermore, educational disability is defined as 'a disorder or impairment that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or impairment' (Law no. 11, 1965, Ministry of Education). This presents a problem, as Kuwaiti children have to consistently fail (repeating the year due to inadequate grades) for approximately two years before a formal diagnosis can be conducted, as only then the child is considered 'unable to fulfil lifestyle needs' (Nicolson, 2008). This is an unfortunate situation, as it can lead to a downward spiral of poor literacy skills, impacting motivation, in turn resulting in avoidance of text-based tasks, subsequently creating emotional trauma and eventually evasive strategies such as misbehaviour or truancy (Nicolson, 2008).

2.2.1 Terminology

The etymology of 'dyslexia' shows that the word is rooted in Ancient Greek and translates to 'difficulty in words'. The word first appeared in the field of education in 1896, having first been used by Pringle-Morgan (Regan & Woods, 2000; Snowling, 2000).

In Britain, dyslexia began to be recognised in the late 1800s. Miles and Miles (1999, p.4), cite a 1886 observation by Dr. Morgan, who described a child as being intelligent, fast learning and equal to his peers for all intents and purposes; however, he noted that the boy was unable to learn to read.

A key turning point in the understanding of dyslexia in the UK occurred with the creation of the 'Word Blind Centre' in the 1960s. This centre provided services such as diagnosis and educational support for the dyslexic community. Recognition improved throughout this decade, culminating with the official recognition of dyslexia

by the legal system in 1970. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) was established shortly after, in 1972.

The arrival at the term 'Dyslexia' after extensive of alternate labels such as 'Word Blindness' and 'Strephosymbolia', serves as testament to the degree of consensus already achieved by researchers. While the use of labels has been called in to question by the scientific community – largely due to abuse and misunderstanding of such labels – the use of labels which encompass relevant and helpful theoretical advances is beneficial to those classified with such labels, with Critchley citing the label 'dyslexia' as an example:

“It implies vastly more than a delay in learning to read, which is but the tip of iceberg. The etymology of the term 'dyslexia' expresses admirably a difficulty – not in reading – but in the use of words, how they are identified, what they signify, how they are handled in combination, how they're pronounced, and how they are spelt (1981, p. 2).”

Terminology in the local context plays a significant role in the perceptions of those participating in this study. The Arabic term for dyslexia is *eusr alqira'a* عسر القراءة – the literal translation of this is 'difficulty of reading'. According to Taqi Al Dean, 2014) Both older and more recent Arabic studies into dyslexia do not examine the use of this term and consider dyslexia to be included in literacy learning difficulties, a delayed reading ability, or failure to read (Al Mulah,1985; Al Sharqawi, 1987; Awad,1988; Taweenat,1989; Khair al zad,1991; Jaljal,1993; Al Subaee,1999; Maqdeesh, 2005; Haj SDabri, 2005; Al Mayah, 2006; Al Basheer, 2006; Taweenat, 2011).

2.2.2 Models of disability

Great changes have occurred in the field of dyslexia due to the increase in scientific and educational research (Reid, 2001) and diverse explanations aiming to shed light

on the tangible symptoms of dyslexia have been presented (Doyle, 2002). As noted earlier, consensus is yet to emerge regarding the definition of dyslexia and its causes (DfES, 2004). Various models have been presented to approach this, however, which this section discusses, along with my choice of model.

Medical/ individual deficit model

The earliest explanations of symptoms relating to dyslexia emerged from a medical approach to the problem. At that time, dyslexia was perceived as a neurological condition, thus medical efforts to explain it naturally appeared to be the best way forward. Subsequently, other approaches have emerged to determine the causes of dyslexia (while still maintaining a medical paradigm), such as the phonological approach. Snowling, (1998) stated that a medical model of dyslexia has revolved around suggested inherent cognitive weaknesses, which primarily manifest in phonological tasks. Frith (1999) took a different approach by suggesting three levels at which dyslexia manifests itself. The first of these is the biological level, in which the impairment was of genetic origin. Secondly, the cognitive level features shortcomings in processing. The resultant third level is behavioural, at which poor literacy skills appear. Frith stresses the contrast between biological and behavioural levels and describes how the surrounding environment has a critical influence on the interaction between the two. (Riddick, 2001) brings in elements of the social model. To treat dyslexia as a medical issue is to define it in terms of a problem or disability experienced by a person with dyslexia, with a specific cause (disease, trauma, health issues etc.), that can be treated or managed through professional intervention (Farrell, 2004, p.76). This is relevant in the case of dyslexia, as this perspective suggests that phonological impairments are classified as disabilities due the

importance placed on literacy by schools and wider society (Riddick, 2001) The professional is placed in a position of knowledge and authority, while the dyslexic person is categorised as having an incompatibility with the world to which they must adapt.

The potential impact of the medical model is clear in categorising Special Educational Needs. The creation of labels, which are applied to individuals on the basis of specific impairments or abilities, stems from this model, though more than one condition may be covered by any given category. Elliot and Place (2004) prefer the term 'specific learning difficulties' which can encompass students whose overall academic and cognitive performance is strong and their literacy problem is specific to reading and writing, which thus may be a more accurate approach to labelling. In this case, labelling can be beneficial to the student. Elliot and Place also mention that dyslexia should be grouped with dyspraxia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia in a subset of specific learning difficulties, rather than dyslexia alone becoming synonymous with the term.

Social model

Hasler (1993, p.80) described the social model as "the big idea" of the British disability movement. The social model came to prominence following the 1976 publication of *The Fundamental Principles of Disability* by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). The report outlined that: "it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society" (UPIAS, 1976, p. 14).

Within the social model, it is acknowledged that the individual's relationship with society can be affected by being designated 'disabled', creating difficulties in terms of achieving equal rights and equal provision with other members of society. Oliver (1996) discusses some features of the social model. He described it as an attempt to shift the focus from limitations caused by impairments to those caused by surrounding environments and cultures, from which distinct issues arise.

This had far reaching implications on the thinking surrounding dyslexia at the time, as it argued that the social exclusion associated with dyslexia could not be primarily attributed to impairments themselves, but rather society's approach to such impairments. (Barner & Mercer, 2004). This exploration of the impact on life as a whole has led to calls for a different approach to disabilities – instigated by disabled people themselves – known as the 'social model', which seeks to enact the same equality of opportunity that has been fought for on behalf of women and ethnic minority groups throughout the last century (Oliver, 1990).

This model has numerous benefits. Crow (1996) explains how it empowered her in confronting and prevailing over exclusion and discrimination. This model provides an opportunity for introspection by disabled people that is free from the limitations of their conditions. It has also steered many in their pursuit of social change by promoting self-worth, collective identity and political organisation. This has led to change in policy and practice towards disabilities, with Crow describing the model's contribution in this regard as "incalculable" (Crow, 1996, p.6).

Medical and social models of disability and dyslexia

The medical model of dyslexia retains the greatest influence on the perception of the condition; however, this means that the importance of social factors is underplayed,

weakening the ability of people with dyslexia to make changes to society. Wearmouth et al. (2002) highlight this situation, proposing that the social model of disability should have a strong presence in decision-making for future dyslexia-related practice and policy. Irrespective of the efforts that have to be made to function in spite of an impairment, disabled individuals may not be able to lead a 'normal' and fulfilling life; though any definition of 'normal' is of course problematically intertwined with the perspectives of the individual and wider society. As such, responsibility for acknowledging and eliminating barriers for affected individuals extends to everyone in society, not just 'professionals'. This attitude towards making the passage through education as straightforward as possible is infused in the conception and evolution of 'Dyslexia Friendly' Schools and inclusive classrooms (Mackay, 2004). Dyslexia Friendly Schools thus represent a concrete effort to go beyond the limiting conceptions of the medical model, which sees only cognitive impairments, towards a wider, more supportive view. This includes taking into account the social environment in which dyslexic students operate, making the social model of disability appropriate for conceptualisation of the challenge.

Bury (2000) holds that disabilities primarily have biological causes. Bury maintains that while a disability is not caused by social oppression, social settings can also have an effect. This aspect of disability was recognised in the implementation of the Disability Act of 1995 in the UK, which had the intent of reducing social exclusion on the basis of any disability, working towards social fairness and equal access to resources. This goal was more specifically linked to education by the Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) in 2001, which provided the right to all students to undertake their education within mainstream schools. From 1st October

2010, disability discrimination issues were encompassed by the Equality Act. According to the British Dyslexia Association “Dyslexia has been recognised difficulty under Equality Act 2010, replacing the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This means that employers should ensure that disabled people are not treated unfavourably and are offered reasonable adjustments or support” (BDA, n.d.).

In part, society’s growing sensitivity towards dyslexia can be connected with how it is portrayed in the media, demonstrating the growing prominence of the social model in alleviating the obstacles faced by dyslexics. This awareness has also been seen in the attitudes of teachers, according to recent research into trainee teachers and their view of dyslexia, wherein teachers are seen to be setting out on their careers ‘with a positive set of behavioural beliefs and values about dyslexia and reformulated normative attitudes’ (Gwernan-Jones and Burden, 2010, p. 80).

2.2.3 Explanations and understandings of dyslexia

There are many different understandings or explanations of dyslexia; and while this study is presented through the lens of the social model, it is important to briefly examine the different models in order to show the complexity of the concept.

Biological explanation

Throughout the last three decades, attempts have been launched in order to identify a genetic element in for dyslexia. Gilger, Pennington and Defries (1991), for example, estimated that the likelihood of a child with one dyslexic parent also having the condition stands at 40%. It was also noticed that the language areas in the brain of a dyslexic individual differ from those in a non-dyslexic person (Price, 2012). According to DfES (2004, p.37) “Literacy difficulties may be a result of the impaired

development of a system of large neurones in the brain (magnocells) that is responsible for timing sensory and motor events”.

When taken into consideration alongside environmental factors, biological factors play a role in cognitive development. The cognitive level then serves as a bridge between the two (Frith, 1999).

Cognitive explanation

Riddick (1996) claimed that evident problems were more easily observable in the cognitive area. The cognitive model explains that phonological processing difficulties stem from issues such as short term and working memory, organising, summarising, and learning new information (Too, 2000). Peer and Reid (2003a) cite difficulties in automaticity as indicating why students may struggle to undertake new learning, and such face difficulty in adjusting unsuitable learning habits.

Phonological explanations

The International Dyslexia Association (1995) highlighted the crucial influence of phonological knowledge in literacy learning, with this being a valuable discovery for researchers (Torgenson, 1995). A wealth of studies support the claim that phonological weakness forms the basis for dyslexia (Baddeley and Wilson, 1993).

Difficulties in learning phonics arise from a child's inability to distinguish sounds within verbally presented words; the phonological deficit argument would hold that these children are probably dyslexic (Reid, 2009). Snowling's (1998) view is consistent with this, asserting that weak phonological knowledge is related to poor literacy. Her view suggests that the role played by phonological knowledge in dyslexia accounts for acquisition of literacy, with the various manifestations of dyslexia being attributed to phonological deficit. If this link is valid, then the

manifestation of dyslexia may vary across languages, since languages vary in the way in which their orthography represents phonology (Reid, 2009).

The specific role of each aspect of phonological awareness in literacy development remains controversial (Anthony & Francis, 2005). This awareness is weak in dyslexic children, particularly in the detection, segmentation and manipulation of syllables (Tijms, 2004). Phonological knowledge is a substantial factor in dyslexia, and studies have been conducted into the similarities and contrasts of dyslexia in different linguistic environments in order to evaluate the commonality of phonological positions and contributing to the development of international assessment practices.

Discrepancy model for identifying dyslexia

The discrepancy model depends on using the reading specific subset of the IQ test to identify dyslexia. Practitioners search for a 'discrepancy' between the other subsets of the IQ test and the reading specific subset, if such a discrepancy exists, the child is identified as dyslexic.

Proponents of the discrepancy model such as Turner argue that IQ is a well-established predictor of academic success and claim that this is why it is sometimes used as the basis of a discrepancy definition (Turner 2000). Stanovich (1991) however, expressed scepticism that dyslexic children vary from poor readers in terms of performance, heritability and neuro-anatomy in the absence of a reading IQ-discrepancy.

Reid and Kirk (2001) suggest that the nature of the conventional IQ test means that some subtests are challenging for dyslexic individuals, so for this reason, the aggregate score may not represent the individual's real intellectual ability. Snowling (2013) explains that since it has been observed that dyslexia occurs throughout the

IQ spectrum, the 'discrepancy definition' of dyslexia is no longer used. Unfortunately, this is still the model used in Kuwait in screening for dyslexia.

Interactionist model of dyslexia

According to the interactionist model of dyslexia, environmental factors as well as individual factors should be considered when determining the child's needs. The difficulties students with dyslexia face might not be entirely due to biological variables, but could be due to their interactions with their environment, their family and social relations, emotional state and mental well-being. (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). This understanding contrasts greatly with all the aforementioned explanations, and it is easy to see why. Biological, cognitive, and phonological factors can all be objectively measured; however, environmental factors pose a greater challenge. It is difficult to objectively assess environmental factors as there is no assessment tool to determine the environment that the child was brought up in and what factors he/she was exposed to. This difficulty in objectively assessing environmental factors is perhaps the reason why most models do not tackle this issue, and perhaps contributes to the lack of breakthroughs in dyslexia "treatment". If environmental factors did in fact play a major role in the development of dyslexia, then not studying said factors and trying to address them could be hindering progress in the field.

2.2.4 Definitions of dyslexia

Since the original conceptualisation of dyslexia, many differences and perspectives have emerged to ascribe characteristics to a condition that is multi-faceted, diverse and complex in its manifestations.

Jacob, Wadlington and Bailey (1998) state that “dyslexia is a controversial term with multiple definitions” (p. 364) and this seems to make it impossible “to provide a definition of dyslexia that is accurate, reliable and agreed upon by everyone” (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002, p. 197). In fact, Doyle (2002) identified more than 500 definitions of dyslexia. Riddick et al. (1999) point out that without a worldwide definition it is difficult to compare studies conducted in different countries, for example, the USA and UK. This range of definitions does not, however, mean that some are not more accepted than others.

Many British researchers have arrived at the consensus that dyslexia pertains specifically to language skills, with difficulties occurring in essential areas such as, writing, orthography, speech, and numeracy (Snowling, 2000). In attempts to describe and identify dyslexia, two widespread definitions are often used by researchers and practitioners. One is the British Psychological Society [BPS], (1999, p.18), which defines dyslexia as:

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the ‘word’ level and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. (p. 64)

Cooke (2001), in offering a critique of the BPS definition, identified various issues affecting its validity. She highlighted that it does not assist dyslexic learners and fails to provide encouragement or optimism for the future. A further weakness in the definition is the use of the term ‘word level’, which lacks precision and accuracy. Students who previously had difficulty in this area but have made strides to successfully overcome this may be left confused as to whether or not they remain dyslexic (Cooke, 2001).

The second definition that is often used is that of the British Dyslexia Association [BDA] (2007):

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills ... It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention.

At that time, many specialists believed that this was the most complete definition thus far. They concurred that dyslexia was not merely a difficulty, but could also be clarified as a disability – providing a more holistic representation.

As Mortimore (2003, p. 49) points out, much of the research literature on dyslexia illustrates the 'deficits' or 'weaknesses' in one or more areas: "phonological processing, short-term memory, visual deficits, automaticity". Looking at 'differences' as opposed to 'deficits', however, has been regarded in recent years as being more beneficial, as "these differences enable dyslexic individuals to have particular strengths, such as good conceptual and creative higher-order thinking skills" (DCSF, 2004). It was noted that each child may face different difficulties or have different abilities, regardless of their scholastic, linguistic or socio-economic background. Another argument in favour of the use of 'difference' rather than disability is that there is no 'cure' *per se* for dyslexia, which is often a question when discussing disabilities. This is stated by the International Dyslexia Association:

Dyslexia is not a disease and, therefore, there is no cure. With proper diagnosis, appropriate and timely instruction, hard work, and support from family, teachers, friends, and others, individuals who have dyslexia can succeed in school and later as adults. (IDA, 2013, p. 5)

There seems to be some confusion in Kuwait however as to the availability of a cure. This is embodied in the mere presence of Model schools (discussed more

later on in the chapter), in which the student enrolls for a select number of years which would generate confusion amongst society as to whether the child has been 'cured' from dyslexia or not.

In 2009, the UK government-funded Rose Report (Rose, 2009) (*Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*) broadly defined the condition as: "Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling" (p.30). Rose qualified such statements by adding that dyslexia does not exist in a consistent form across all cases and that no clear cut-off points had emerged. He invoked various indicators of the condition, such as motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, which would be co-occurring, whereas if they existed individually, they would not be a conclusive indicator of the presence of dyslexia. He highlighted that a method of assessing the severity of dyslexia would be the level of responsiveness of the individual to a "well-founded intervention" (Rose, 2009). Dr John Rack, Dyslexia Action's Head of Assessments and Evaluation (and a member of the Rose Expert Advisory Group), commended the report as a landmark for dyslexia in the UK, as one of its contributions was a unified definition based on an extensive literature review (Rack, 2009, p. 1). Numerous education professionals have questioned the validity of such sweeping definitions of dyslexia. Elliott, (2009) distinguishes between reading difficulties and dyslexia:

Most definitions - including I suspect the one in this report - simply describe children who have difficulty learning to read and write. We've known for generations there are plenty of such kids in society. They do need special help - but what they don't need is some pseudo-medical label. It's just really woolly thinking. (p. 2)

Elliott & Gibbs (2008) argue that having labels such as dyslexia to describe a subset of children with reading difficulties is detrimental to the rest of the unlabelled children, as they will thus not receive the same level of support as those who have been labelled.

In Kuwait, the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA) is the primary body that deals with defining, identifying and supporting dyslexia. It is therefore the sole definition that exists in the country and it states the following:

Dyslexia is a learning disability that manifests primarily as a difficulty with written language, particularly with reading and spelling. It is separate and distinct from reading difficulties resulting from other causes, such as a non-neurological deficiency with vision or hearing, or from poor or inadequate reading instruction... Dyslexia is actually an umbrella for several symptoms related to each other. There is no controversy for example in naming roses although there are many kinds of roses are different from each other by scent, color and form. Thus, every child suffers from dyslexia, his Dyslexia characteristics may differ from what distinguishes another child suffering from dyslexia, but he is shared with all children, who have the same specific disability in learning reading, writing and spelling. (Q8da.com, 2016)

As can be seen, this definition seems to adopt a 'copy-paste' approach without any useful adaptation made for the societal/cultural factors that undoubtedly affect dyslexics, one of which is discussed further in the chapter in 2.2.8. Since that is the case, and since no added benefit can be derived from using the KDA definition, in my study, I will adopt the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) 2007 definition of dyslexia mentioned previously. This is also because this definition supports both educational and cognitive perspectives. The educational viewpoint is identified through reference to difficulties in reading, spelling and writing, and the cognitive perspective to the cognitive difficulties, such as short-term memory. Additionally, it is a holistic, pro-inclusion definition and identifies not only weaknesses but also strengths. It also takes an optimistic tone towards dyslexia and develops a more

humanistic and positive understanding. This type of positive outlook is certainly needed in the context of this study, where there remains much confusion about the nature of dyslexia, with many negative stereotypes and inappropriate approaches still pervading.

2.2.5 Dyslexia as a ‘myth’

Several misconceptions still pervade about dyslexia, with the idea that dyslexia is a ‘myth’ being a myth in itself. On several occasions in the past, public discourse concerning dyslexia has been sceptical as to whether the condition even exists, thus aggravating the spread of such misinformation and myths. One instance of this was when the MP Graham Stringer suggested that dyslexia was not real and was merely an excuse for teachers’ inadequacies, citing lower instances of dyslexia in other countries (Furnham, 2013). Others have claimed that the disorder is part of the PR of certain academic institutions and individuals as an excuse for students who are ‘behind’ academically (Nosek, 1997).

Reid Lyon (1997) from the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development claims that this debate contains misunderstanding, ignorance and reported inaccuracies which lead to disagreements about whether or not dyslexia exists, and to negative opinions about it. Lyon says there is a lack of awareness and understanding about dyslexia by those affected by it, such as teachers, employers of dyslexics, and the public in general.

This ambiguity as to the existence of the condition could be partially due to it being a ‘hidden disability’, according to Lyon (1997). It does not appear until the child’s literacy and social abilities are tested. According to Goffman (1963) there are ‘evident’ and ‘non-evident’ disabilities; thus dyslexia can be classified as ‘hidden’ or

‘non-evident’. This causes some cases to be diagnosed as socialisation issues or influenced by external factors that are somehow possible to ‘overcome’, rather than a problem that will persist for life (Cadman, 1976).

2.2.6 Cultural specificity and dyslexia in the Kuwaiti context

Dyslexia in Kuwait is a subject of debate unto itself. A national study conducted in 2002 by the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA) estimated that 6% of the native Kuwaiti population was dyslexic (Kuwait National Dyslexia Association, 2002). In addition to an intervention programme, two types of dyslexia assessments were introduced by the Egyptian Dyslexia Association (EDA). Firstly, an early dyslexia diagnosis system, which is achieved through the administration of the Arabic Lucid CoPS (Cognitive Profiling System), has also been adopted by the KDA and is administered alongside audio-visual tests.

The Centre for Child Evaluation and Teaching (CCET) was founded in 1984. This was initiated by a mother of dyslexic children who were obliged to seek assessment and support planning overseas due to the absence of such services in Kuwait. The CCET began as an institution offering assessment, tuition and support planning. These services were expanded in 1994 with the support of the Ministry of Education and equipment and facilities were upgraded, such as in classrooms, a gym and a music room. Reid (2016) described the CCET as the most prominent institution in Kuwait providing support for children with learning difficulties. The organisation also works to provide research and academic literature on learning difficulties, along with aiming to spread awareness and build capacity among educators.

The Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA) was established in 2005, as the first Dyslexia Association in the region. The KDA is responsible for helping to establish Dyslexia-Friendly schools and creating technical identification tools and programs.

2.2.7 Arabic and dyslexia - a general overview

Arabic has three generally accepted forms, those being Classic, Modern and Spoken Arabic all sharing a script of 28 letters. Both Classic and Modern are standardised forms found across the Arab world, with the former being used mostly in religious contexts and the latter for the majority of modern written texts, technical language, education and formal discourse, and is thus recognised as the main official language in all Arab countries.

Spoken, or colloquial, Arabic is the true native language of most Arabs and differs vastly across geographies; there are also varying degrees of formality based on how much the speaker chooses to borrow from Modern Arabic. It is spoken at home, on the street and some of the higher registers may be heard on talk shows or in classrooms. Thus it should be emphasised that Arab children use one language in virtually all reading and writing (Modern Arabic) and another in spoken interactions. The proximity of these dialects for Modern Arabic varies, but comparisons to the relationship between Latin and the Romantic languages have been made.

As Elbeheri, Mahfoudhi, & Everatt (2009) explain, literacy in Modern Arabic is crucial for achievement in the education system and most white-collar jobs. As in all Arab states, schools in Kuwait use Modern Arabic as the official language of instruction until the tertiary level, where English is used, which may complicate matters as many parents may prioritise learning English. In reality, teachers do not consistently use Modern Arabic and will often revert to their native dialects, as many Arabic teachers

in Kuwait are from other states in the region, further complicating language learning for Kuwaiti students.

Arabic is written from right to left. Most letters can be written in two or three different forms, depending on their position in the word (i.e initial, middle, or final), and whether or not they link to the letter that precedes or follows it.

| Name | Phonetic | Isolated | Final | Medial | Initial |
|-------|----------|----------|-------|--------|---------|
| alif | [ʔ] | ا | آ | | |
| ba: | [b] | ب | با | باء | باء |
| ta: | [t] | ت | تا | تاء | تاء |
| tha: | [θ] | ث | ثا | ثاء | ثاء |
| ji:m | [j] | ي | يا | ياء | ياء |
| ba: | [h] | هـ | ها | هاء | هـ |
| kha: | [x] | خ | خا | حاء | حاء |
| da:l | [d] | د | دا | | |
| dha:l | [ð] | ذ | ذا | | |
| ra: | [r] | ر | را | | |
| za: | [z] | ز | زا | | |
| si:n | [s] | س | سا | سين | سين |
| shi:n | [ʃ] | ش | شا | شين | شين |
| sa:d | [s] | ص | صا | صاء | صاء |
| da:d | [d] | ض | ضا | ضاء | ضاء |
| ta: | [t] | ظ | ظا | ظاء | ظاء |
| za: | [z] | ظ | ظا | ظاء | ظاء |
| 'aln | [ʔ] | ع | عا | عـ | عـ |
| ghaln | [n] | غ | غا | غـ | غـ |
| fa: | [f] | ف | فا | فاء | فاء |
| qa:f | [q] | ق | قا | قـ | قـ |
| ka:f | [k] | ك | كا | كـ | كـ |
| la:m | [l] | ل | لا | لام | لام |
| mi:m | [m] | م | ما | ميم | ميم |
| nu:n | [n] | ن | نا | نـ | نـ |
| ha: | [h] | هـ | ها | هـ | هـ |
| wa:w | [w] | و | وا | | |
| ya: | [y] | ي | يا | ياء | ياء |

Figure 1: Arabic letter formations

As shown in figure 1, 20 letters change their form between initial/medial and final positions, and eight change form if they are linked to the following or previous letter.

Dyslexia in Arabic

Dyslexia manifests itself differently across different languages and is not language independent (Everatt & Elbeheri, 2007). The varying forms of Arabic letters might

have an immediate effect on letter position errors, as certain positions would not be appropriate for the letter forms presented, hence many letter position errors might be blocked, leading to a decrease in the rate of such errors.

The fact that Arabic exists as the official language in 22 countries does not shed light on the vast dialectal differences between the spoken varieties. As a consequence of this – particularly in Kuwait where a significant number of both students and teachers originate from other Arab countries – students may speak one dialect at home and learn another in school. Silliman, Bahr, Wilkinson, and Turner (2002), elaborate on this difficulty. They claim that the difference in dialects could cause children to be susceptible to weaknesses in phonological processing, which in turn could lead to false diagnoses of language difficulties.

2.3 Identification of dyslexia

It is often the case that dyslexics have a sense that they have difficulties but are unable to define exactly what they are. They are also often aware of their own intelligence and capabilities (Kenny, 2002), whilst also being aware of what is required in terms of effort and time to match the performance of their classmates, who may continue to do better than them. Labels such as ‘thick’ or ‘lazy’ (Miles, 1993), especially when expressed by teachers or other classmates, can lead to the children themselves accepting these labels, unless any indicators to the contrary are offered.

Early identification is considered to be crucial, but is yet to be universally adopted. This is due to a number of factors, one of which being the notion that diagnosis cannot be performed until a child is seven years old (Riddick, 1996; Fawcett and Nicolson, 1995). This would be based on the child’s literacy levels at a time when it

would be possible to measure reading age in relation to actual age. Quantifying the child's 'deficit' in literacy is also problematic and it is unclear how much a child should be 'struggling' before the label is applied (Prior, 1996).

Snowling, Duff and Petrou et al., (2011) suggest that teachers of young children can observe children's performance relative to the expected results of the age group, along with utilising screening tools in order to identify children at risk of learning difficulties. The BDA (2009) states that if the student has not received adequate schooling, then this could be the underlying reason for failure at school; and that problems with eyesight or another physical difficulty could potentially hinder the development of sufficient literacy skills, and must therefore be ruled out (BDA, 2009). While it is commonly accepted now that early identification can improve the success of support, debate still exists surrounding the means of achieving early identification. Some have suggested a 'screening' process for children entering reception year, while others cite the unreliability of blanket screening tests, arguing that better methods are available for identification (Rose, 2009).

There are many factors that hinder the identification of dyslexia worldwide. Firstly, there is a lack of a single, globally recognised definition of dyslexia. Furthermore, there is a risk that the ability to identify difficulties and develop inclusive practice can be constrained by financial and human resources as dyslexia is defined as an SEN. It is hence important to explore how dyslexia can be identified in the global context, while making sure that the resultant cost is manageable to developing countries.

Even if early identification is achieved, Snowling (2013) highlights another issue, which is the delay between identification and intervention. Furthermore, many interventions do not account for ongoing needs. This signals the need for a re-

evaluation in many approaches to special needs intervention. In Kuwait, as assessment and the decision to transfer children to a school for learning difficulties are initiated by parents, this delay can be amplified by organisational constraints or a lack of parental concern.

2.3.1 Identification of dyslexia in Kuwait

As previously mentioned, the identification model used in Kuwait is the discrepancy model, which has been phased out in most parts of the world. The identification process only starts when the child has repeated the year twice, for achieving inadequate grades. The child needs to struggle significantly before any form of identification or intervention is offered. The procedure relies heavily on IQ tests, which diagnose in terms of the discrepancy model.

While the KDA provides identification processes, these have to be pursued by the parents as there is no concurrent cooperation between the KDA and the Ministry of Education. The parents usually pursue assessment privately at great cost following the preliminary IQ-based assessment sometimes conducted by the school. While schools often acknowledge results from the KDA, they also frequently fail to heed the recommendations of the report, forcing parents to repeatedly follow up on their child's case with the school in an attempt to have their needs met.

The CCET centre has undertaken a five year project (since 2011) to generate four standardised tests at the national level, two of which have been put into circulation. At the time of writing, the third test is currently in the process of being printed and the fourth is close to completion. These tests however are not standard practice, and need to be sought out by the parents sometimes, as most schools will not handle the identification process despite the CCET working closely with the Ministry of

Education. This only happens after the IQ Testing suggests the presence of a problem.

These tests are:

- 1) Test of Phonological Processing for Children;
- 2) Test of Orthographic Processing and Morphological Awareness for Children;
- 3) Test of Reading and Spelling for Children and;
- 4) Test of Working Memory for Children.

These tests, presented in Arabic, are based on locally conducted research, published in the same language, and are planned for use among native speakers ranging from 7-11 years old. A diagnosis by the CCET through schools may be met with a more appropriate response from teachers due to their cooperation with the Ministry of Education; however, the resultant support may sometimes be minimal and inadequate. The lack of training in dyslexia amongst teachers has created problems, as they often lack both an understanding of the issue and have been found to be unable to identify it or support the children who have it. There is, therefore, a clear need for enhanced training and the provision of specialists in each school, which would benefit children with special needs, the education system, and society in the longer term.

2.3.2 Labelling

The act of labelling can have both positive and negative implications – what Solvang (2007) called 'bright' and 'dark' sides. Labelling is frequently addressed in research into the assessment of dyslexia. A significant amount of research has been conducted into parents' perspectives on the matter (Heaton, 2002; Riddick, 2010; Rief and Stern, 2010). Examinations of these perspectives do not, however, simply

seek to yield positive or negative responses, as parents often perceive advantages and disadvantages in each case (Riddick, 2000). There are genuine reasons for labelling, which can be deemed as reliable when it appropriately identifies a learning difference, the existence of which retains validity through a variety of further identification efforts and tests. If a label grants access to support for a child because the resources are available to those carrying the label, then it can be beneficial for the child and therefore a valid exercise (Wise & Snyder, 2001). Moreover, Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) highlight the fact that labelling can aid the process of awareness-raising in society at large. The term 'dyslexia', for example, has entered mainstream usage in many Western countries, although it can be argued that the term is misunderstood by some. Wider acknowledgement and awareness may lead to "increased adult tolerance . . . that helps teachers and carers understand why the child [has particular difficulties]" (Gross, 1994, p. 105). The BDA (2013) stated that "the gifts that dyslexia can bring need to be celebrated" (BDA, 2013, p.2). It also mentions some of the strengths of dyslexics, like big picture thinking, strong visual skills, creative talent, excellent troubleshooting skills and innovative thinking.

A clear example of negative labelling is the perception of dyslexics as 'lazy' or 'stupid'. This is likely to stem from the fact that dyslexia is a hidden, non-evident disability (Riddick et al., 2002). Unlike some conditions, such as Down's Syndrome, dyslexia does not exhibit clear identifying symptoms. The nature of modern day society plays a role in the confusion surrounding the condition. Dyslexic adults may face a lifelong struggle in trying to learn the literacy skills required for fluent reading and spelling. This does not mean they are not able to read and write; it means they have a very hard time doing so due to the onus placed upon them by a society which

is largely literacy-based. Most people who find reading easy can find it extremely difficult to comprehend why someone who is highly intelligent in many aspects of their life would struggle with something as simple as reading.

In a telling illustration of the distress such societal misconceptions can cause, Dowana's (1995) study of dyslexic university students demonstrated that the majority of them felt relieved after discovering that their problems stemmed from an identifiable condition. To know that they were not "mentally retarded" was a source of great relief, and they were better able to ask for appropriate help from their school or university, such as with their workloads and exam conditions. Vinegrad (1992) recalls from his personal experience that for dyslexics who have been called 'lazy', 'careless' or 'stupid' their whole lives, being able to point to dyslexia as their label instead can be a form of psychological relief. Being labelled by peers, educators, and work colleagues as 'lazy', 'stupid', 'thick', 'dumb', 'crazy', 'mentally retarded' (Humphrey & Mullins, 2002; McNulty, 2003) made many believe they were of lower intelligence than their peers throughout their school life. The positive effects of labelling therefore came from a new-found prospect of being able to request and receive assistance (Barga, 1996).

The label of dyslexia is not in itself an all-encompassing solution, however, as society reacts to dyslexia according to its own interpretation of the label (Schafer & Olexa, 1971, cited in Barga, 1996: 416). Indeed, additional provision of support and assistance is not a purely positive outcome of labelling. Barga (1996) reported that students perceived labelling negatively in cases where it resulted in segregation from classmates, highlighting their exceptional treatment and 'difference'. The need for distinct labelling and provision for students has been challenged on a similar basis

by Young and Tyre (1983), a view reiterated by Kerr (2001), who claimed - after conducting research in the area of adult education - that to label someone dyslexic could 'disempower' both the student and their teacher, with resultant lower learning expectations.

Riddick (2000) claims that the construction of a literacy-based society poses an obstacle for dyslexics; yet circumstances oblige the individual to seek a diagnosis before securing support and adjustments. As Danermark (2001) suggests, "in order to be able to speak of dyslexia, we need to live in a society based on reading and writing". Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that dyslexia is simply a social construct. Both neurological and societal factors play a role in creating the circumstances for the emergence of the concept of dyslexia (Danermark, 2001, p. 58).

According to Riddick (2000) labels can be perceived differently in different contexts, dyslexia therefore can be perceived at a personal and public level. On a personal level, some may use the label dyslexia as an excuse to stop trying, a reason to avoid challenge or take an easier path in life (Riddick et al., 1997). On a public level, the identification of dyslexia can lead to greater support within education. However, in many cases, children with dyslexia do not receive any sufficient support.

In Kuwait, labelling forces parents of children with dyslexia to face the dilemma of choosing between mainstream schooling, which may not sufficiently be able to accommodate their child's needs, and the cultural stigma of their child being taught in a school specifically for labelled 'learning difficulties'. This shows that even the positive effects of labelling in certain societies become moot due to the lack of appropriate means of intervention following said labelling.

2.4 Provision and support for children with dyslexia

No single approach can be identified as best practice in supporting students with dyslexia and learning difficulties. Some studies suggest a holistic approach drawing on numerous frameworks (Ellis, 2005). This would involve a carefully considered, integrated selection of research-based practices and principles applied to curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment (Lewis & Batts, 2005; Meo, 2008). Others have observed that teaching approaches through direct and strategic instruction are known to be productive for students with learning difficulties (Ellis, 2005). Certain factors will influence the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, such as class size, time constraints, classroom management issues, the breadth of the ability spread of learners, and students' adaptability to adjustments. Regular classroom teachers can be advantageous for learners with difficulties (Lewis & Norwich, 2001). In situations where teachers do not have suitable awareness of the child's difficulty, however, it may not be beneficial for the child (Kataoka et al., 2004). Teacher awareness of dyslexia is key to successfully helping learners, as poor awareness can create heightened levels of stress among those students (Karande et al., 2009). An experienced teacher's understanding of dyslexia is perhaps more clear and analytical than the formal definitions used by organisations, as it is based on real life experience and work with dyslexic children. (Regan and Woods, 2000). Considering the still vague and ill-defined nature of dyslexia, this is not surprising, as formal definitions try to pigeon-hole students to fit into a model from the narrow lens of an organisation. However, this same philosophy can also be true of teachers' own perceptions, as they are shaped by the limited number of dyslexic children that they have taught in their careers, and their own personal experiences with them (Payne

and Turner, 1999). Brown and Bell (2014), conducted a small-scale qualitative study of dyslexia within international schools of Bangkok. Participants of this study indicated the need for more awareness of dyslexia and the fact that the schools are lacking resources and teaching expertise to make learning easier for dyslexic children. The study also showed how detrimental it can be to only identify that the child is dyslexic, without factoring in his individual strength and how much he's affected by it. Brown and Bell indicated that in order for this to be successful, there needs to be good cooperation between parents and professionals. This study attempts to understand the Kuwaiti teacher's understanding of dyslexia as it is more likely to be useful in providing support, than a formal definition provided by organisations with a general "copy-paste" attitude towards challenging concepts.

Just as teachers' perceptions significantly influence their decisions when dealing with students with learning difficulties (Beswick, 2008), the way in which teachers respond to student performance influences students' self-perception, with this having ramifications for self-concept, motivation, and, ultimately, scholastic performance (Cambourne, 1990; Munns, 2007). It is thus important to shed light on the culture of school staff when suggesting areas of improvement and support for inclusive teaching (Grimes, 2013, p. 187). Peer and Reid argue that teachers must observe the following when dealing with dyslexic students: 'Teachers are dealing with learners who despite their difficulties may indeed be extremely able and are as frustrated by their struggles as their teachers!' (Peer and Reid, 2003, p.3)

2.4.1 Teachers training

Since the advent of the social model of disability at the end of the twentieth century, the number of pupils with special educational needs that are included in mainstream

schools has dramatically increased (Armstrong et al., 2011). Subsequently the need for teacher training in SEN has risen (UNESCO, 1997; UNESCO, 2008). It has also been noted that teacher training enhances teachers' understanding of the nature of various disabilities and increases their positive attitude towards inclusive practice (Sharma & Sokal, 2013). Indeed, according to Mackay (2004), one of the fundamental requirements for a dyslexia friendly school is teacher training in dyslexia and special educational needs in general. It influences the teaching and assessment of children with dyslexia, the provision of support, and encourages teachers to work in partnership with the parents.

Inclusive schools place additional demands and responsibilities on teachers to be accountable for fulfilling the needs of children with learning difficulties (Rouse, 2008). Many teachers express concern over the fact that they are unable to deal effectively with pupils with learning difficulties, dyslexia included. Teachers have expressed concerns in areas such as characteristics of dyslexia, daily assessment, and remediation (Wadlington & Wadlington, 2005).

In order to assist all types of students, teachers must be able to work under the regular stresses of the classroom environment. This is particularly important given the additional duties associated with teaching children with dyslexia (Peer & Reid, 2001). The obstacle hence lies not only in sourcing suitable materials and identifying appropriate evaluation strategies, but also with accountability for success of all learners. Long et al. (2007) explain that both high quality teaching and accountability are important in ensuring progress for dyslexic learners.

In Kuwait, teachers at the inclusive schools reported no training whatsoever with regards to SEN (Almuhareb, 2007). This would leave the burden on the teaching

staff to pursue a course of self-education that has been reported by some to be demotivating. Only the teachers working at the Model schools received any form of training in learning difficulties. This was limited to a 'crash course' lasting less than a month with mostly seminars and no hands-on experience in teaching pupils with learning difficulties. It has been argued that teachers should be given the opportunity to interact directly with people with disabilities and witness successful models of inclusion in order to not only increase their proficiency, but also their motivation at such a seemingly massive undertaking (Sharma & Sokal, 2013). Lack of training seems to be a problem not limited to Kuwait only as a study by Reraki (2015) about dyslexia friendly practice in Greek primary EFL classrooms found that while dyslexia friendly practice did indeed benefit the classroom environment as a whole, more training was required to truly realise the potential of inclusive practice.

2.4.2 Other supportive factors

Teaching assistants were also identified as playing an important role in supporting students with literacy difficulties (McPhillips et al., 2009). Farrell et al. (2010) remark that they can be a constructive influence upon specific subsets of students if they receive suitable training and support (p. 447).

Undoubtedly, parents are also key players, although they often struggle to assess their children's needs alone (Heaton, 2002) The Rose Report (Rose, 2009) stated the importance of parents' awareness that their child was receiving the best available support.

The Rose Report (Rose, 2009) pinpoints the lack of school support as the main grievance expressed by parents. There are increasing calls for parent involvement in support (Rose, 2009; DfE, 2011). Parents play a fundamental role and can

influence a child's performance greatly (Byrne, 2011). Riddick (2010) found a high instance of uncertainty about their children's future among parents. The literature as a whole demonstrates that parents of dyslexic children face various difficulties both before and after identification.

2.4.3 Impact of support approaches

Regarding the results of practical support, (Klassen, 2001, cited in Riddick, 2006) studied the reading progress of 67 who had previously been assessed as having either specific literacy difficulties or dyslexia. All had received statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN), and were technically entitled to specific types of well-targeted additional support to address their literacy difficulties. Results were disappointing, as Klassen reported that for each year of extra support, students mostly made only six months' worth of progress. Students showed signs of catching up with the rest of their classmates in only 13% of cases. This study indicates that although effective, intensive reading intervention methods are available (Brookes, 2003), there is a gap between well-evidenced practices and their consistent application in real life settings. This is not, however, to claim that the correct methods will prove to be the solution to all problems – there is also evidence that students with the severest of difficulties in literacy will still progress more slowly than their peers, irrespective of even the best designed and implemented reading programmes (Brookes, 2003). While this may give a 'gloomy' outlook towards efforts aimed at supporting children with dyslexia, it must be noted that the results are hopefully unlikely to represent the outcome in Kuwait for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the sample size is relatively small and unrepresentative of the Kuwaiti population. Additionally, this study was in a society with a well-established framework for

identification and support, in which some means of support were provided irrespective of the SEN statements due to the better level of awareness amongst teachers. In somewhere such as Kuwait, where teachers showed a generalised lack of awareness towards dyslexia, any increased support is likely to be at least partially beneficial.

Similarly, a study of the possible outcomes of dyslexia friendly practices by Reraki (2016), showed that while there weren't marked improvements in the performance of dyslexic students, their motivation was significantly improved. Additionally non dyslexic students showed improvements in both motivation and performance. Not only does this advocate for the use of more dyslexia friendly practices, but it raises the question of whether said practices need to be re-evaluated to further enhance the performance of the dyslexic students. Regardless of these ponderings, it has been mostly demonstrated that these practices are beneficial to the classroom environment as a whole, and there are no demonstrable disadvantages to the students' learning in general.

2.5 Inclusion and children with dyslexia

If a child receives a diagnosis of dyslexia, he or she may still be able to gain sufficient literacy skills if early identification is achieved. Yet this presents a distinct challenge, as typical characteristics of dyslexia, such as literacy issues, will persist on a long-term basis; in other words children struggling must be monitored over time to determine the permanence of the issue (Rose, 2009). This added complexity contributes to its perception as a 'hidden' disability, even when sympathetic teachers accommodate known literacy difficulties, since other areas of processing difficulty can be overlooked or ignored. While children may appear to have a regular memory

span for visual information, evidence suggests that their capacity for vocabulary memorisation is usually below the age group average (Snowling, 2000).

This is connected with the question of whether dyslexic students should receive separate provision from the rest of their classmates (Lewis & Norwich, 2005). Traditionally, this type of provision has taken (or ideally taken) a multi-sensory, small-step route, delivered on an individual basis (Fawcett, 2002). This stands apart from the aims of the inclusion paradigm, since it singles out particular weaknesses in the individual and addresses them, leading to potential separation between the individual and the rest of their class (Dyson & Skidmore, 2002). It also contradicts the notion of providing equal education opportunities for all children, including those with additional needs (Booth et al., 2002). Indeed, it has been suggested by Stanovich (1994), following a review of available research, that there was “no support for the notion that a concept of dyslexia is needed which separates dyslexia from more neutral terms such as “poor reader”. (p.588)

Nevertheless, the tension between facilitating universal access to the curriculum, and tailoring teaching to individual needs is yet to be resolved. This is exacerbated when one considers that teaching requirements (and a pupil’s own opinions) may develop and change over time. Recent court cases have shown that students who feel that they have at some stage been offered inappropriate provision may seek to redress this (Avramidis et al., 2000). This is further complicated by the problem of identification, in which it is unclear which actor/s holds responsibility for the detection, analysis and correction of a student’s underperformance. This problem persists when it comes to determining the party/parties responsible for exercising informed and objective judgement. Placing an explicit responsibility on the classroom teacher

to understand and be aware of dyslexia, its symptoms, and implications, may be the best approach at this time, according to Reid (2005), spreading the reach and impact of such knowledge beyond the limited sphere of the dedicated specialist.

Successful inclusion is often characterised by supportive classroom climates, high teacher expectations, and strong pedagogical knowledge. Diverse styles and experiences in the classroom will support, challenge and develop all children, with Mackay (2011) explaining that students should be taken out of their comfort zones to better reveal their strengths and weaknesses (2011, p.170).

Attitudes are 'multidimensional' and involve affective, behavioural, and cognitive components (Haddock & Maio, 2007; Loreman et al., 2011) which should hence be acknowledged in the study of them. Attitudes emerge from beliefs, personal thinking and contextual influences such as the media. As attitudes develop through socialisation, they can be in the same manner (Loreman et al., 2011). Attitudes are evaluative, and will often play out in both verbal and nonverbal behaviour (Ajzen, 2005). Attitudes are also governed by cultural influences, which are structurally entrenched in society and are influenced by social, political, and economic factors (Thompson, 2011). These in turn impact the belief systems developed by teachers about inclusive education. Lambe (2011) cites the potential pedagogical and attitudinal barriers to inclusive practice (p. 976) which can be addressed by teachers seeking to establish inclusive environments. Adopting a positive attitude towards inclusion is a significant step in considering alternative teaching methods for students with learning difficulties. While this could be developed during service, suitable context, support and experiences during pre-service training would be an effective means of entrenching this mind-set.

The suggestion that all dyslexic children might be taught and treated in the same way would be to grossly misunderstand the condition, though this approach does occur in some schools (Hall, 2009). In the UK and the USA, Individual Education Plans/Programmes (IEPs) are seen as an essential means of supporting children with learning difficulties (Riddick, 2006). Although such plans are at the core of Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy, significant questions have been raised about their effectiveness (Rotter, 2014).

The IEPs are intended as a guide for educators, but of course they are rendered ineffective if they are disregarded. Norwich and Lewis (2001) mention that for some students, including those with reading and writing difficulties, “the growing consensus that there are common approaches to teach literacy for diversity, including those with specific learning difficulties and the view that something different is needed that is additional and is not by most pupils” (p. 321). Lewis and Norwich (2005) suggest, however, that “the pedagogical approaches for dyslexia are essentially ‘adaptation of common teaching approaches’ and these adaptations can vary in intensity depending on individual needs” (p. 146), which could have a major influence on inclusion practice.

Ireson and Hallam (2001) identify a common theme regarding inclusion, in that the policy consensus continuously ebbs and flows between inclusion and segregation. Inclusion recognised as a specific concept within the literature and Thomas (2001) highlights its common presence in mission statements, policy speeches and documents as an indicator of its acknowledgement. Inclusive schools are responsible not only for providing education opportunities, but for ensuring that their staff “actively and constructively seek ways to instruct all students without exclusion”

(Gerber, 2002, p. 314). The idea behind this was to meet special needs and include the inherent preference for students of all types to be educated without segregation from peers. This inclusive attitude was endorsed by a number of influential groups, including political, parental, and educational organisations (Condie et al., 2009). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) profoundly affected attitudes and policies, leading to a stream of directives in the UK, such as the *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DfE, 1994), the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement (DfEE/QCA, 1999) and *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004). A significant development has been that other parts of the world have begun to adopt similar approaches, as Pijl et al, (1997) claims: "In recent years, inclusive education has become so central to the education policies of a large number of countries in both the developed and developing world that commentators have been able to describe it, without exaggeration, as a global agenda" (p. 36). In the UK, mainstream schools will undertake measures such as intensive reading support (Brookes, 2003) and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) in order to assess and support dyslexic students. Nevertheless, the benefits of some of these measures have been critically examined (Klassen, 2001), due to a perceived excessive focus on children's weaknesses (Fulcher, 1989). Moreover, emotional issues (e.g. self-esteem) are not sufficiently addressed (Riddick, 2006).

Some of these issues have been tackled in subsequent educational development (DfE, 2014), such as strengthening family engagement. The 2010 Equalities Act presented new financial support sources for dyslexic children and adults alike (GEO & DCMS, 2013). This has been reflected in this study's context (Kuwait), where

students with special needs were previously identified and sent to segregated schools, but inclusion has been introduced in recent years. This development, the factors leading to it and the environment in which it occurred will be further explored below.

2.5.1 Approaching inclusion in Kuwait

The discussion surrounding dyslexia and the accommodations made for those who are affected by it is a relatively new phenomenon in Kuwait. Kuwait did not experience an organic, indigenous development of understanding, but rather looked to the UK's approach in order to stay abreast of modern trends in education. Most of the work done in Kuwait regarding dyslexia is based on the British model, thus it is essential to discuss the origins of that model. In addition, when discussing the development of provisions for dyslexia, particularly over the last 50 years, one cannot separate it from the wider history of special needs provision. Gerber (2002) sees the history of special education as reflecting strategies devised by schools to cater for "the immutable fact of human differences in conflict with the ambition to build systems of universal mass education" (p. 304). This section will thus address the origins of the globalised inclusion model and its validity in local contexts.

Among the Arabic Gulf states, Kuwait was the earliest adopter of inclusion in education, at least in terms of rhetoric (Barr, 1983), having become a member of UNESCO in 1960, and a signatory to several declarations of the rights of disabled persons to be included as equal members of society (Cairo, 1999, Dakar, 2000 and Beirut, 2001). These invoke commitments to educational provision for all, within mainstream classes where possible, or else in special programmes. The commitments are backed up by annual progress reports carried out by member

countries, though the content of the reports provided by the government have a tendency to provide imprecise and generalized accounts of the situation. Kuwait's Parliament and Higher Council for Disabled Affairs provides all the documents relating to the associated recommendations. These fail to give any indication of definite movement towards more inclusive practices in education, according to Albustan and Al-abdulgafore (2002), lacking the creation of a curriculum aimed at inclusion, or improvements in training for teachers in this area.

The subject of inclusion continues to be a subject of open discussion in the media, and public awareness is gradually improving. The Undersecretary of Education, Haitham Al-Athri, reaffirmed the importance of inclusive education, pointing out that it had already been implemented in the 'Mubarak al-Kabir' school district. (Al Khaldi, Al Anba newspaper, 2012.). He commended the cooperative efforts of governmental institutions and non-profit organisations for playing an effective role in serving students with learning difficulties. 13 middle and high schools had been accredited as 'inclusive' institutions by 2012. According to the CCET, the term 'inclusion' refers to including students with learning difficulties in classes with their 'normal' peers, and ensuring that they attain sufficient support and equal opportunities in learning.

Claiming successes in previous efforts (citing the establishment of four 'Model schools'), the Undersecretary explained that the Ministry would continue to work diligently to improve academic standards for students with learning difficulties. Model schools are mainstream specialised schools for children with learning difficulties. The project is a co-operation between The Ministry of Education and the Center for Child Assessment and Education (CCET); teachers were selected from many primary schools and trained under the supervision of a British company specialized

in this field. The first Model school hosted 70 students identified as having learning difficulties out of 1500 students in Kuwait. Also announced were efforts to prepare two secondary schools for enrolment of special needs students, (which was requested by parents of the children enrolled in the Model schools at the time the data was collected). In giving an example of a success of the Model schools project, the Director of the Mubarak Al-Kabir school district cited an improvement in the pass rates of special needs students from 11% to 86%, without giving further details as to how this was achieved. (Alkuwaityah.com-203497, 2015).

2.6 Dyslexia Friendly Schools (DFS)

The conception of DFS held by the BDA is based on an interactional model that defines both targeted interventions towards solving basic processing problems and changes to the wider environment. This is done to combat the negativity that dyslexic children often face from within their classroom. A dyslexia-friendly school operates with the basic principle that: “If a child does not learn in the way in which we teach them we must teach them in the way in which he learns. Let dyslexia be looked at from a different angle, not as a learning disability but a different learning ability” (Pollack, Waller & Politt, 2004 *‘Day to Day Dyslexia in the Classroom’*)

Neil Mackay is credited with the first use of the term ‘dyslexia-friendly’, in a 1994 presentation given to the BDA (Reid, 2004, p. 88). The recommendations he proposed were then adopted by a number of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England and Scotland (Crombie, 2002). At the centre of this ethos is a holistic addressing of differences in learning; indeed Mackay (2004) proposes that the use of ‘specific learning difference’ is preferable to the more prevalent ‘specific learning

difficulty', since it encompasses concepts of strength as well as weakness in categorising students.

Dyslexia-friendly approaches target inclusion of both dyslexic students and those with other different learning needs. The DFS support pack outlines that "inclusion is at the heart of everything. Keeping the learner as the focal point of policy and practice allows you to successfully meet the needs of all pupils within your establishment." (2013, p. 30). In discussing the importance of this initiative, Mackay (2006) claims that the 30% of students who are under threat of literacy failure could be decreased to 3% with effective dyslexia-friendly practices.

It is important to define the term 'friendly', and envisage the characteristics that an inclusive school might possess. As Norwich et al. (2005) point out, an essential part of being a Dyslexia Friendly School is the "acceptance that parents have anxieties and are responded to positively". Despite its obvious attractiveness, however, Riddick (2006) suggests that care must be taken that the phrase is not adopted without a thorough understanding of its meaning, in addition to the policy and practice implications it has for any school adopting its ethos. Not only do dyslexia-friendly approaches assist dyslexic learners, study has shown that Dyslexia Friendly Schools' good practice is in fact good practice for all. (Dyslexia Friendly Schools Support Pack, 2013).

Johnson (2004) has suggested that dyslexia-friendliness ought to mirror the condition of dyslexia itself, operating on a continuum from mild to severe, to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of learners within a given school. Other principles are also stressed in the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Resource Pack published by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 1999), where it is stated that:

Being an effective school and being dyslexia friendly are two sides of the same coin. Effective schools enjoy strong leadership, value staff development and pay close attention to the quality of instruction and learning. These are schools in which all children are important, regardless of ability or difficulty. (p. 5)

The case has been made, particularly by Peer (2004) that these considerations of teaching approaches made for dyslexic children can actually have a positive effect on inclusive learning for all in a mainstream school (p. 157). It has also been argued that various practices advanced for use in dyslexia-inclusive schools could have wider reaching positive repercussions for many types of children, rather than exclusively dyslexics (Riddick, 2006, p. 148).

In 2012 the British Dyslexia Association published the *Dyslexia Friendly Schools Good Practice Guide*, which explained the dyslexia-friendly quality mark for schools. “The philosophy underpinning the BDA Quality Mark is that changing practice to accommodate dyslexic individuals often results in good practice for everyone” (BDA, 2012,p.7).

The BDA Quality Mark is made up of standards that cover four key areas, which are:

- Standard One: Leadership and Management. This standard is comprised of criteria focusing on policies implemented in school to assist dyslexic learners and stipulates that schools prove that the policies are truly practiced on a day-to-day basis.
- Standard Two: What is the quality of learning? This is a set of criteria that determine staff expertise and knowledge regarding the identification and support of dyslexic learners and the appropriate use of interventions.

- Standard Three: Creating a climate for learning. This calls for the investigation into school marking policy, to ensure that all students are being fairly assessed for their knowledge and understanding rather than just spelling.
- Standard Four: Partnership and Liaison with Parents, Carers, Governors and other Concerned Parties.

The criteria will explore the signposting opportunities provided to parents and their accessibility. It will assess response protocol for parent concerns.

The BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark is an externally granted mark of approval with international recognition. It seeks to construct a support and understanding framework for schools, allowing dyslexic students to enhance and develop skills and talents. This seeks to ensure that all within the school are aware of the needs of dyslexic pupils and that resources are provided to meet these. This aims to improve achievement levels among all types of learners. There are no benchmarking platforms for dyslexia friendliness in Kuwait, nor are there any for SEN or inclusion. The mere fact that a school is labelled inclusive after an initial assessment is usually cause for celebration and nationwide media coverage, as cited above in the Al-Kuwaitiyah article. This attitude of glorification of nominal achievement is continuously hindering progress in all fields within the country, as it leads to complacency without meaningful follow-through.

2.6.1 The development of 'Dyslexia Friendly' policy and practice in the UK.

Riddick (2006) recalled that over the last five years of the 20th century, the Swansea Local Education Authority (LEA) became concerned about the dissatisfaction reported by parents in regard to dyslexia support within schools. Furthermore, they

noted the increase in the quantity of SEN statements that were being issued in relation to dyslexia (which the LEA were responsible for funding). SEN statements must lay out all the child's support and resource needs. They are legally binding, which makes them a major draw on the LEA's special needs budget. The above concerns were not isolated to Swansea LEA, but were being voiced at the national and international level and by many other LEAs, especially the issue of increasing numbers of SEN statements. A review of existing dyslexia support provision was carried out by Swansea LEA's professionals, including consultation with parents and teachers, the development of training initiatives, and the organisation of a conference in association with the BDA. The outcome of this review was the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Forum, set up with the function of exploring what a dyslexia friendly school might look like. A "dyslexia friendly school policy" was put together over the next four years (1997-2001), which included:

- Increasing dyslexia awareness among staff;
- The hiring of a dyslexia expert in most schools;
- Working closely with parents and children;
- An extensive collection of research tools; and
- A dyslexia policy in the school. (Riddick, 2006).

The policy highlights the key role played by training, including dyslexia awareness training for all teachers in the school, and additional specialist training for at least one staff member. It was expected that any teacher should be able to support dyslexic students in their class, and have knowledge of a variety of techniques for effective teaching, for example multisensory pedagogy. There was also provision in the policy for good information and feedback in the school-parent relationship,

responding to their concerns swiftly and adequately, and creating an environment in which the use of the term 'dyslexia' does not cause discomfort for the parents or children (Riddick, 2006).

School environments are a crucial factor in the success of DFS. There is a link between schools that are effective and those that are dyslexia-friendly, on the basis that through the environment improving policies of the latter, more attention will be paid to maintaining good practices in the classroom. Mackay stated that "being an effective school and becoming dyslexia friendly seem to be two sides of the same coin" (Mackay, 2001, cited in Dyslexia Friendly Schools Support Pack, 2013, p.55)

The DfES SEN Code of Practice states: "schools should not assume that children's difficulties always result solely, or even mainly, from problems within the child. A school's practices make a difference, for good or evil". The key for the teacher is to achieve a balance between achievement and challenge within the patterns of strength and weakness of each learner. (Dyslexia Friendly Schools Support Pack, 2013, p.29).

Where practical, the building up of skills is incorporated into wider curriculum teaching, which proposes that the prevention of failure through well-developed national and school-level systems is the best way to deal with the condition. It acknowledges that the responsibility for combining content and context lies at the structural level, rather than with the pupil, since the "dyslexic student is not responsible for the curriculum, nor the examination system which places him/her at a disadvantage" (Peer & Reid, 2002, p. 241). Conflicts may arise, however, in attempting to align nationally consistent qualifications with the individualised

approaches of the dyslexia-friendly model, which is to a great extent dependent on school-level decision making.

Similarly, there is a disconnect between the drafting and the application of effective policy, meaning that good practice may arise in some areas or aspects but not in others. Norwich et al., (2005) demonstrated that the effectiveness of dyslexia provision was significantly related to an LEA's support for SEN in general, but also that well-implemented dyslexia policy was of benefit to all SEN students, not only those with dyslexia. Going beyond this not only challenged readers, but those considered 'good' readers also found developmental benefits through the Dyslexia Friendly Pack (Elliot, Davidson & Lewin, 2007). The Dyslexia Friendly Pack further notes that "more children are successful when taught using dyslexia friendly teaching methods" (*Planning a dyslexia friendly school* insert, p. 1)

As such, the practices and policies employed by individual schools or LEAs can be a source of great interest, and Norwich et al. (2005) noted a number of 'dyslexia-friendly' approaches. They generally found, however, that although dyslexia was widely recognised, it was not often served by a well-developed response. Only one school provided a whole-school approach that limited the impact of dyslexia through involving parents and children, not only reacting in terms of dyslexia-friendly teaching practices. This exemplary practice was dependent on the dedicated headteacher, an appreciation of professional talent and experience, and working in connection with the LEA, particularly with educational psychology professionals (Norwich et al., 2005). Indeed, the implementation of dyslexia-friendly practices should not, according to Peer and Reid (2002), be left up to subject teachers or individual specialists; rather, it should be addressed by the school as a whole.

Concepts such as DFS need to demonstrate which of their services are not included in the greater notion of an inclusive school. This is not incidental when one considers that the key policy developments in this area over the last three decades have concentrated on a range of SEN and diversity in general. The BDA, for instance, may be seen as the action of a sectional interest, rather than the best path to improving the overall welfare of children with additional needs. The DFS initiative is therefore under pressure to show that it contributes to inclusivity, rather than being a disruption. Trying to find a balance between accommodating all types of additional learning needs and making provisions for specific requirements is a major challenge faced by policymakers, schools and voluntary organisations. Notably, it is argued that Dyslexia Friendly Schools also worked towards providing support for pupils with literacy difficulties and many other forms of SEN (Mackay, 2001).

The Dyslexia Friendly Schools are now considered as one of the main developments for the inclusion of learners with dyslexia in the UK (Reid, 2005). In 2012, the BDA published a new dyslexia-friendly resource pack. The teaching methods and materials that the teachers can use in a dyslexia-friendly classroom are designed based on dyslexic pupils' strengths and weaknesses. An inclusive education for learners with dyslexia includes interventions and accommodations, as both these elements allow learning to take place in spite of some learners' difficulties with certain skills (Shaywitz et al., 2008). The dyslexia-friendly approach has proved relatively popular in the UK for promoting the inclusion of dyslexic pupils

2.6.2 Overview of education systems in Kuwait

Before addressing DFS in Kuwait, it is worth providing a general overview of the educational system and the SEN provision in the country, as inclusion has thus far

seemed to be applied in its simplest concept where all children, regardless of disability/learning difficulty, had the right to education from 1965.

Kuwait is a small country situated in the Arabian Gulf (Persian Gulf). It is a high-income country, with a GDP per capita of above \$24,000. Oil exports make up nearly half of Kuwait's national income and about 80% of government revenues.

The education system in Kuwait is divided into four stages – kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and secondary, each lasting two, five, four and three years respectively (Ministry of Information in Kuwait, 2011). Education is obligatory for the primary and intermediate levels. There are three classifications of schools: Public, Private and Qualitative. Religious education, special education, and adult education are the domain of Qualitative education (Ministry of Information in Kuwait, 2011). All levels of public education, including tertiary, are free of charge.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was little formal education to speak of in the country, save for some private religious schools attended by the children of the wealthy. The government began to provide formal education a few decades later, and by 1945 there were 17 schools in Kuwait. With the explosion in oil revenues following World War 2, the government embarked on an ambitious social program, investing generously into social services, particularly education. This, coupled with Kuwait's brief education history, go a long way towards explaining the current situation found today, one that is characterised by inexperience juxtaposed with a well-funded education system.

The commitment to education for all children was formalised in 1965, when education became enshrined in the constitution as compulsory for children aged six to 14. Every citizen now technically had a right to education, regardless of their social

class or educational needs, displaying the first efforts to accommodate children with 'Learning Difficulties'. Since the turn of the century, the Ministry of Education has set out a longer-term educational policy focusing on teaching. This aims to bring teaching methods up to the standard of Western countries to prepare future generations for a globalised world. According to Kuwait's Association of Individuals with Disabilities, special needs students are defined as a category of the community with particular needs, especially in those educational aspects that mean they require different types of education from learners in traditional schools. (Almoosa et al., 2012). Historically, Kuwait has included students with learning difficulties in schools, regardless of whether or not they were benefiting. With the call for development, the notion that special needs children required different types of education became policy and special schools were created. Current thinking in Kuwait has now returned to inclusion due to its popularity in the West. Kuwait has also enacted legislation, guided by the constitution, supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities to access education, rehabilitation, and employment (Almuhareb, 2007).

From a personal perspective, this situation has led to a complacency of sorts, as many – either within the Ministry of Education or society as a whole – feel proud of the country's achievements and do not feel the urgent need for further development. This is reflected in many ways, particularly in the language used by educational bodies and the media, which often tout the country's success and make unrealistic comparisons with Western countries. This section aims to identify some of the government's approach to dyslexia, with these being discussed later.

2.6.3 Overview of SEN provision and inclusion in Kuwait

The history of dedicated special needs provision within the Kuwaiti education system is not extensive, largely due to cultural attitudes towards affected children, which kept them out of mainstream teaching environments. As it stands, various schools exist for specific disabilities, for example, for the deaf, blind, and severely cognitively impaired. The funding for special educational needs that was announced in 1996 therefore marked a significant change within society. (Szathmary, 2006).

In 2008, the National Report on Development of Education underlined the major issues that Kuwait grapples with in applying inclusion policies, such as political, cultural, social, technological, and cognitive challenges (Ministry of Education in the State of Kuwait, 2008). Most special needs students continue to study in public special education institutions. There was an attempt to include children with learning disabilities, hearing and visual impairments into mainstream education classes. This was not received favourably, however, as teachers found it too challenging in the face of poor preparation for such a drastic measure. Most teachers at that time were not trained in special education (Almuhareb, 2007).

Moreover, the special education institutes follow an identical curriculum without any policy of individual accommodation, posing another major challenge. In addition, public school buildings have not always taken special needs into account in their design specifications and are thus often not accessible for disabled students, forming another barrier to inclusion. The Ministry of Education in Kuwait has expressed the need for newly constructed schools to be equipped with technology to accommodate all types of students (Almoosa, Storey & Keller, 2012).

While the implementation of inclusion as a model is mostly lacking, promising signs are beginning to emerge from the authorities. In 2007, UNESCO outlined the numerous obstacles facing inclusion in Kuwait, such as resource, data and labour constraints, along with clarified curricular guidelines targeted at diversity and low family involvement. The hope was that this should jumpstart effective changes in policy and practice towards inclusion. While not much has been done as of yet, hope still remains as the issue frequently receives media coverage.

2.6.4 Dyslexia-friendly schools in Kuwait

In 2005 The KDA has liaised with the British Dyslexia Association and has launched its own Dyslexia Friendly Schools (DFS) Initiative, which is backed by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education and the UNESCO regional committee in Kuwait (Elbeheri, 2008, cited in Aladwani and Alshaye, 2013,p.500). Model schools are specifically targeted at special needs students, while DFS are public schools that have been modified in practice and policy to meet the needs of primary school students with reading and writing difficulties. The DFS Initiative's purpose is not to attempt to 'skill up' classroom teachers to become dyslexia specialists. Instead it seeks to contribute to a change of approach that will empower teachers, rather than make them feel that such work is only the domain of specialist teachers. According to the KDA, the percentage of dyslexic students in primary schools in Kuwait is 6.29% (United Nations Development Programme, 2012) This stands as the highest official figure in the region, as researchers investigating dyslexia in Egypt have asked to use it in their studies, and the United Nations is currently considering the idea of turning the Kuwait Dyslexia Association into a regional centre to serve the entire Arab world, since there are no viable centres elsewhere.

There are several main principles that allow a school to adopt a 'Dyslexia Friendly School' label, which are the policies, the training, and the diagnosis tools. This includes sorting, assessing, following through and catering for the needs of dyslexics, and finally being in touch with the parents and teachers as partners in the educational process (ALRAI newspaper, 2011). In light of active support and enthusiasm for the responsibility in the Ministry of Education and school managements, a lot of new schools have shown interest in joining this project, campaigning for a dyslexia-friendly society where barriers for dyslexic people do not exist. The number of Dyslexia Friendly Schools in Kuwait stands at 22, distributed among the educational districts. These schools accommodate 6000 pupils with dyslexia. The Kuwait Dyslexia Association undertakes screening and assessment of children who are at risk of dyslexia before they enter the first year of primary education, and provide the schools with confidential reports for each case (KDA, 2010).

2.7 Chapter summary

Researchers have long been attempting to study the origins and nature of dyslexia. Brown, (2011) stated that defining any condition is quite important for practice. This can be complicated, as according to Elliot (2014) defining dyslexia can be both easy and difficult. It is easy because it is agreed that the definition should concern the characteristic and specific difficulties experienced by those who are struggling to read. It can be difficult, however, as the field is yet to provide a universally accepted definition, which makes it difficult to provide accurate assessment and creates uncertainty around diagnosis (Siegel & Lipka, 2008, cited in Elliot, 2014). Identification is somewhat linked with labelling. Labelling can have positive and

negative effects on those who experience it. Labels give individuals an explanation for their problems, which in turn can open up avenues to specialised help and support. Conversely, labels can lead to, and enhance stigmatisation.

The literature on inclusion practices come across many theoretical and practical issues, tensions and dilemmas throughout the educational system (Norwich, 2008; Dyson, 2005). The present literature focuses on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of inclusion rather than its actual implementation. It thus remains unclear the extent to which children with learning difficulties and/or dyslexia should be included in mainstream schools, particularly in countries like Kuwait where inclusion is in its initial stage.

Perceptions about dyslexia have adjusted over time. Dyslexia has begun to enter use as a difference rather than a disability (Mackay, 2006). As Mackay describes it: “A learning difficulty implies that there is something ‘wrong’ with the learner, leading to identifying weaknesses rather than celebrating strengths” (p. 5). Children with dyslexia can be creative and successful (Lawrence, 2009). They simply respond better to different teaching methods (Clarke, 2000). Children with dyslexia in Kuwait, as well as other countries, do, however, struggle to cope with their schools.

The complexity of dyslexia is represented in the absence of an international definition of the condition. These diverse views on the condition's characteristics have complicated its definition and even led to doubts about its existence (Elliott, 2008). Moreover, the tension surrounding dyslexia affects the motivation to provide the needed support. This is a subject of debate unto itself in Kuwait despite the diversity of research conducted around dyslexia. There has only been very limited research

conducted in Kuwait, especially qualitative research. Most of the research conducted in Kuwait has thus far focused on a quantitative approach.

This study is designed to fill existing gaps in the literature, such as in-depth exploration of the understandings of dyslexia in Kuwait. This study also highlights the implication of current practice and the way dyslexia is perceived in Kuwaiti primary schools.

By examining the aforementioned issues, I expect this study to offer insights and understanding of dyslexia in the Kuwaiti context. It is also hoped that it will offer helpful suggestions for the improvement of existing provision for students with dyslexia in Kuwait. To guide this study, the research questions have been formed as follows:

- 1) How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?
 - a. How do teachers, students, specialists and parents perceive dyslexia?
 - b. How do policies portray dyslexia?
- 2) How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included?
 - a. How are children with dyslexia identified?
 - b. How are children with dyslexia supported?
 - c. How are children with dyslexia included?
 - d. What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices?
- 3) To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools?

Having discussed the foundations and goals of this study, the following chapter present the methodology, which will look at how these goals will be achieved.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe the research design, which followed a case study approach, in detail and outlines the rationale for using the methods derived from an interpretative paradigm in order to explore the understanding of dyslexia and perceptions on the current identification, support and inclusion practices for dyslexia in Kuwait from different angles. This will reflect the perceptions and experiences of teachers, students, and parents regarding the inclusion of students with dyslexia in mainstream primary schools in Kuwait. The underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions are discussed further in relation to this choice. The chapter will also describe the sample, data collection and analysis processes.

Researchers in education can impact their research fields through different philosophical approaches (Pring, 2004, p. 88). Crotty (1998, p. 1) highlighted the indistinct relationship between methodologies, methods and their theoretical elements and according to Crotty, even the same terminology can be adapted differently, and in some cases, contradictorily. One important step in addressing the philosophical dimensions underpinning research methodology is the 'concept of paradigm', defined by Grix as: "the understanding of what one can know about something and how one can gather knowledge about it" (Grix, 2004, p. 78). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm consists of three elements: ontology, methodology and epistemology (p. 99). They also added a fourth aspect, "ethics", to the elements of the paradigm (2005b, p. 183). The theoretical and philosophical assumptions, the methodology and the ethics followed in this study will be addressed in more details below.

3.2 Theoretical and philosophical assumptions

This study explores the understanding of dyslexia conceptually and practically and the ways in which the perceptions of teachers, students, parents and wider society are reflected in current practices in primary education in Kuwait. The study concentrates on understanding the conceptualisation of dyslexia in Kuwait. This involved an investigation of Kuwait's policies for including dyslexic students in primary schools and an exploration of current practice in Kuwait from different angles, through my own research observations in classrooms and through the opinions and experiences of teachers, students, parents, and decision-makers. I therefore sought to understand actualities, social realities and perceptions before providing results which could be interpreted to identify trends and themes. On this basis, I avoided the scientific paradigm as the framework for my research, since it fails to take into account the unique ability of "the individual to interpret his experience" (Cohen et al., 2003).

Interpretivism proposes that reality (including facts, values and perceptions) is socially constructed. The concept of 'dyslexia', for example, is a socially constructed phenomenon and is thus interpreted differently by various individuals. Such multiple realities have an impact on the methodology used in the interpretive paradigm. To "understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" is the role of the interpretivist researcher (Cohen et al., 2007a, p.19). The intention of this study was to qualitatively explore perceptions about dyslexia and current practice. The interpretive paradigm has served as an appropriate vehicle due to this study being exploratory in nature. Explanations are thus understood at

the level of meaning rather than cause through the exploration of the context based on the participants' perspectives (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Radnor (2002) states that interpretive research "is trying to come to an understanding of the world of the research participants and what that world means to them" (p. 29). An interest in human meaning is central in case study research, but is also a key component of the interpretive theoretical perspective in social sciences (Bakker, 2010). Cohen et al. state that the interpretive paradigm advocates concern and respect for the person (2007). This is expressed at a methodological level by the employment of flexible designs and open methods that give voice to the participants (Dialektaki & Thoma, 2009).

According to Pring (2000, p. 96), researchers using the interpretive paradigm approach education as a "subjective" world formed by the meanings of social actors in their effort to "understand and experience life". There are many constructions in the world and there are as many interpretations of reality as there are individuals who fit into such constructions. The contention is that multiple realities are a corollary of the ontological premise of the paradigm. The interpretive paradigm considers the world as a function of human thought and perception. The aim of interpretive research is to assess how knowledge is constructed through the interaction of people and to interpret each person's account of a situation, which ultimately indicates a unique perspective. Truth can be considered a matter of "consensus", and this is consistent with the epistemological premise of this paradigm. Qualitative methods are used to understand people's perceptions, which are derived through observations and interviews based on people's own accounts. As this study

demonstrates, it is not possible to give a single definition of dyslexia that aligns completely with the variety of opinions held and realities experienced by the participants. A broad, contextualised account of their viewpoints will therefore be more suitable and valuable to explore the reality of dyslexia in Kuwait. This study focuses on participants' personal interpretations and understandings in relation to dyslexia, hence the adoption of a qualitative design based on interpretive understandings was most suitable. The research findings serve only as interpretations. Participants are respected in the sense that they are the subjects who construct the world they live in based on their own personal views.

The following four central interpretive philosophical dimensions have guided the design of the research (all of which are discussed in section 3.2):

- Ontological premise: subjective reality
- Epistemological premise: socially constructed knowledge
- Methodology: case study using a qualitative research approach
- Ethics: ethical considerations.

3.2.1 Ontological premise

The objective of the study is to explore the understanding of dyslexia by students, parents, and school staff, therefore the data has produced multiple interpretations rather than a single account. Reality is taken to be socially constructed, in which an individual's behaviour is continuously interpreted to generate a meaningful explanation, usually within a particular context. It is therefore the case that interpretive, rather than quantitative research approaches are appropriate for this study. Ontology, according to Grix (2010, p. 62), refers to "a system of categories

that make up a particular vision of the world". In terms of ontology, the premise of a social context constructed on individuals' perspectives are an area of exploration for this research. This study hence aims to investigate participant experiences and decisions made based on those perspectives.

Dyslexia was taken as a subjective construct of various understandings and beliefs of the children with dyslexia, their parents, and school staff. The diversity of the subjective understanding of the participants created the many different truths of the concept, which were derived through negotiation and consensus. The ontological premise of this research can be summarised as the multiple realities of understanding dyslexia in Model and inclusive schools, which were constructed dialectically through the various understandings of the participants. This is the ontological position of the interpretive paradigm, which claims that the world is a construction of many multiple realities; in fact, as many as there are individuals (Pring 2005; Radnor 2002).

Constructionism can be perfectly compatible both with relativism and realism, however the two notions are usually considered to be opposed. Realism suggests that the external world exists independently of our perceptions and representations of it (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999) whilst relativism questions the independent existence of the world, highlighting the importance of the interpretations applied to it (Willing, 2013). Constructionism appears to provide a platform for communication between the two ontologies, however. Constructionism does not deny the 'out-there-ness' of objects but it instead necessarily perceives objects in relation to human consciousness; that is, the meaning attributed to the objects is shaped by human

consciousness. Similarly, consciousness does not stand alone: it is instead always consciousness *of* something (Crotty, 2003). Constructionism therefore combines objectivity and subjectivity. “Subject and object, distinguishable as they are, are always united” (Crotty, 2003, p.45).

As constructionism claims that meaning is constructed out of existing objects (ibid.), dyslexia can be considered as an independently existing condition which is ‘real’. The meaning of ‘dyslexia’ is not discovered (or created), however, but built as people engage with the notion of ‘dyslexia’. Dyslexia is not an ‘impairment’, ‘problem’ or ‘difference in learning’ until people define it as such. What is said to be ‘dyslexia’ is really therefore just the ‘sense we make of it’. In conclusion, owing to cultural or interpersonal differences different meanings may be constructed and attributed to the entity, which makes ‘dyslexia’ a relative notion. Under this perspective, constructionism may well be associated with relativist ontology which “questions the ‘out-there-ness’ of the world and emphasises the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to it” (Willing, 2001, p.13).

The way in which a researcher selects a paradigm is drawn partly from their understanding regarding the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is obtained (Hofer & Pintrich, (1997) p. 117). This refers to the principles of epistemology of the study.

3.2.2 Epistemological premise

The second dimension relates to the epistemological premise of the research. According to Grix (2010, p. 63) “if ontology is about what we may know, then epistemology is about how we come to know what we know”. This is based on the

premise that individuals perceive their surroundings selectively and their subsequent actions will be based on those subjective experiences (Radnor, 2002). Epistemologically, the interpretive paradigm emphasises that facts are made through social construction which is supported by values, a key point for acknowledgement by those using the interpretive paradigm. The study drew from a social constructionist epistemology.

As an epistemology, social constructionism asserts that knowledge is historically, culturally specific; that language constitutes rather than reflects reality, and is both a precondition for thought and a form of social action; that the focus of inquiry should be on interaction, processes and social practices" (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377)

In the simplest terms, this epistemological stance holds a constructivist view of the social world, asserting that it is built by human action and evolves continuously. Even concepts that are widely accepted, such as dyslexia, can be treated as phenomena that emerge via the interactions of those with difficulties and those who teach, examine and research them (Burr, 2003). Nonetheless, these constructions exhibit their own degree of reality. By regarding the school as a series of interrelating agents within the structure of an institution, it is clear that it involves more than the mere physical environment that it inhabits; its existence is socially constructed (Byrne, 2002). Crotty claims that social constructionism manages in this sense to be both realist and relativist (1998, p. 63), since socially constructed, negotiated meaning is nonetheless 'real'. Stories and descriptions collected through interviews are not plain reflections of reality, since they reflect the narrator's circumstances and beliefs. Hence, meaning is derived from interpretation of real life experiences, rather than being discovered (Young & Collin, 2004). It is a social construct, in which emphasis

is placed on the collectively constricting and transmitting meaning (Crotty, 1998, p. 58).

My task was to gain access to the participants and their perceptions, to become immersed in their world to some extent and make sense of their constructed meanings. As Radnor (2000) notes, understanding is reached and meanings are constructed and interpreted through interactions between the researcher and the respondents. “People make their own reality” as Miller and Brewer (2003, p.41) put it, however. “This does not mean that we can never really know anything: rather, it suggests that there are ‘knowledges’ rather than ‘knowledge’” (Willig, 2001, p.7) with different people constructing different meanings, even in reference to the same phenomenon or situation (Crotty, 2003). The concept of dyslexia cannot be defined ‘objectively’, because different individuals may have constructed different meanings in reference to the notion.

Crotty (1998) notes the unique role dialogue can play as a way for researchers to become aware of and to interpret the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of pupils. It was possible in this study to understand and interpret the perceptions of individuals through interaction with the children, their parents, and school staff, for example listening, watching, discussing and interpreting more accurately as the human instrument for collecting and analysing the data.

3.2.3 Research Approach

Any research methodology must take into account the aims, context and appropriate data types of the study. I was interested in exploring understandings of dyslexia from the perspectives of teachers, parents, students and specialists, and the implications

of these views on the identification of and support provided for children with dyslexia in Kuwaiti primary schools. Since this involves the gathering and preservation of multiple, explanatory accounts (rather than seeking to produce a statistical or model summary), qualitative methods were applied. In addition, according to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), qualitative studies are better able to deal with the nature of special educational needs, since the uniqueness of the disabled student's condition requires a more nuanced approach.

Creswell (2013, p. 48) explains that qualitative research is conducted to explore an issue or a problem, rather than determine information from other research studies or literature. Qualitative research helps to understand the context in which participants address the issue, so the issues can be understood in detail. The use of qualitative research approaches in this study provided participants with the opportunity to describe their understanding of teaching and learning experiences from their own points of view. Peck and Foreman (1992, cited in Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004) attribute the importance of qualitative research to its suitability for determining the underlying role of ideology, organisational dynamics, and the social/political process in defining policy and practice in special education. Furthermore, it allows education professionals to take an internal view of participants' perspectives, allowing the formation of intervention policy to be based on cognitive and motivational interpretations. Moreover, the qualitative approach is helpful for exploring external factors that may impact special education practice, such as cultural values, institutional practices, and interpersonal interactions. This study also sought to pursue such goals; therefore the methodology took these factors into account,

particularly as studies looking at these aspects in Kuwaiti society are limited. It is also hoped that the study will provide a useful resource for future research into this subject, so as to allow the potential development of interventions, the planning of which will require a sound base of knowledge.

3.2.4 Research Design: Case Study Methodology

Yin (2014) argues that the type of research question being asked quite often determines the research strategy to be utilised. Thus, 'what', 'who', and 'where' questions (and their derivatives 'how many' and 'how much') are likely to favour survey strategies and the analysis of archival records. In contrast, 'how' or 'why' questions are more closely linked to experiments as the preferred research strategies. Since 'how' or 'why' questions are to be the focus of inquiry, a further distinction among research strategies according to Yin (2014) is the extent of the investigator's control over behavioural events and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. Histories are the preferred strategy when there is virtually no access or control, whereas case studies are preferred in examining contemporary events where relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. Investigators can manipulate behaviour directly, precisely and systematically. A case study design, which was used in this study, is useful in examining events when behaviours cannot be manipulated and in exploring in-depth responses to research questions (Yin, 2009). It is defined by Robson (2002) as:

A well-established research strategy where the focus is on a case (which is interpreted very widely to include the study of an individual person, a group, a sitting, an organization, etc.) in its own right, and taking its context into account. It typically involves multiple methods of data collection. (p.178).

The case study 'approach' has been adopted by many theoretical traditions ranging from social sciences to positivist disciplines rather than a monolithic and coherent form of research (Stark and Torrance, 2005). All these approaches place emphasis on the thorough analysis of a unit; however epistemological and paradigmatic assumptions in case study designs may differ a great deal. A greater awareness of the social world can be revealed by qualitative approaches, using a case study methodology. Additionally, since case studies are based in natural settings with the intent of understanding the process of an under-examined area (Benbasat et al., 2007), a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon can thus be explored (Creswell et al, 2007). A case study approach can be exploratory, descriptive, and can also manage a range of evidence such as documents, interviews and observations (Yin, 2014). Indeed, case studies have been increasingly used in the field of educational research (Yazan, 2015) because they allow the researcher to focus on the exploration of a phenomenon completely, thoroughly, and without any attempt to control any characteristics or variables related to the participants or their 'natural' contexts (Yin, 2003; Miller & Brewer, 2003). Case studies enable the impact of policy on children, parents and school staff to be investigated. Case studies can also thus enhance understanding of social contexts as they clarify practice in the policy-provision process (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001). In this sense, case studies provide an academic approach to practical problems which can offer real, straightforward 'solutions'.(Cohen et al, 2003) Some versions of action research might also offer this. A case study's promise, however, is rather that practical problems can be investigated in ways which might allow us to reconceptualise the

problem, understand its wider significance more fully, and act more intelligently in resolving it.

Dyslexia is an under-examined area in Kuwait, the perception of which, and practice, must be observed in its natural setting (such as the classroom and the school environment as a whole); this is because most of the interactions between the relevant participants happen at school. My study sought teachers', students', parents', and specialists' understandings and perceptions of dyslexia, that is, a holistic understanding. Augmenting that holistic understanding was examination of documents (such as school policies and statements). Not only is dyslexia under-examined in Kuwait, the practice of 'inclusion' as a whole (especially with regards to dyslexic children) is severely lacking and has not been thoroughly studied. Complicating matters further was the presence of "Model schools", a completely novel approach towards supporting learning difficulties. Since no prior research has been carried out on "Model schools", an in-depth analysis was needed to truly understand the nuances of the perceptions of the individuals involved, especially considering the complex nature of dyslexia, and the varying approaches of support. Therefore the case study approach was the most appropriate for this study.

3.2.4 Embedded Case Study Design

Yin, (2014, p.53) states that "The same single-case study may involve units of analysis at more than one level. This occurs when, within a single case, attention is also given to a subunit or subunits". This study explores the current identification, support and inclusion practice for dyslexia in Kuwait. The case study includes an exploration of dyslexia conceptually and practically in this context, which consists of

multiple schools that accommodate children with dyslexia and the characteristics of each of these schools as a subunit of analysis. Essentially, two different cases were embedded. The first main unit was inclusive schools as a whole, of which there were four subunits (schools). Within the school were further smaller units of specific children with dyslexia, and several intermediary units (headteacher, teachers, psychologist, and parents of children with dyslexia). The second main unit was made up of two Model schools applying the same focus on the smallest sub-unit (children with dyslexia) and several intermediary units. I believe that this approach is more appropriate for the study context.

3.2.5 The Case Study Sampling

Perry (2005) defines a 'sample' as the source of data used for answering research questions. (p. 55). Given the nature of the current study, a purposeful sampling approach was used. Creswell (2003), states that "purposeful sampling" tends to be used in qualitative data collection, which allows the researcher to select the participants that "have experienced the central phenomenon" (p. 220). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) highlight the importance of determining the criteria for sample selection, which should be based on the aims of the study (2003, p. 97). On the other hand, Gall et al. (1996) state that in qualitative research, there is not a specific rule to follow for the sample size. The sample might include a large number of participants (seeking breadth) or it could include a small number of people (seeking depth). Since this study does not seek to generalise its results, but to understand "what is happening" and "the relations linking the events" purposive sampling was used as the method of selecting the sample (Merriam, 1998, p.21). According to Barbour

(2001, p. 1115) “rather than aspiring to statistical generalisability or representativeness, qualitative research usually aims to reflect the diversity within a given population” allowing the current study to take into account the divergent experiences of the participants.

The first step was choosing the research participants which was based on the research aims. This means that students with dyslexia in Kuwaiti schools were the main focus and since those students were studying in two types of mainstream schools in Kuwait; Inclusive and Model schools, I decided to select samples of students from both types of school. I also included their parents and staff who are involved with them so as to understand how dyslexia is perceived conceptually and practically in Kuwaiti primary schools.

The decision was made to focus on one specific local authority. This district is the only one in the country to claim inclusive practices of children with learning difficulties and dyslexia in their schools and where there is a conscious attempt to identify students with dyslexia. This district also contains the only two Model schools in the country. These Model schools specialise in learning difficulties, were established shortly before the study and will henceforth be referred to as Model schools. This sample was not, therefore, chosen at random, as I wanted to study the reality of recent policy shifts which are yet to be implemented elsewhere to gauge the success of these initiatives and perhaps inform future implementation elsewhere. As Skidmore (1999, p.658) suggests, it is appropriate to use a case study to examine a situation where a “process of planned organizational development was under way”.

The purpose of the research also determined the type of school selected, allowing for the practice of including children with dyslexia to be examined within its social context (Yin, 1984). It seemed appropriate to choose mainstream so-called 'inclusive' schools which include children with dyslexia and learning difficulties in addition to Model schools. Government schools were chosen, as this is supposed to be the context in which government educational policies are applied. Secondly, such schools contain students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, providing a more comprehensive overview of the issue.

The selected schools in this study were all primary schools, single sex (girls or boys) and from the same local authority. Four inclusive schools which included children with dyslexia and the two schools designated as 'Model schools' were selected. These four schools were the only schools that had dyslexic students in the fifth grade that they had not transferred to a Model school. As a reminder, all the students enrolled in these two Model schools were diagnosed as having learning difficulties, as mentioned in the literature review chapter.

It is my strong belief that better results can be produced by focusing on a selected number of cases (schools) and working in depth, rather than researching numerous cases. This allowed me as a researcher to investigate in greater detail and understand the qualitative nuances of each school. Furthermore, I could avoid the pitfall of making superficial or even false evaluations and generalizations. The other reason for this choice, given the stigma surrounding dyslexia and an education system unaccustomed to working with researchers, was that "very often a case will be chosen simply because it allows access" (Silverman, 2000, p. 102).

Participants from each school included teachers, students, headteachers and school psychologists. See. One psychologist abstained from participation; in addition one headteacher did not have time to take part, so I interviewed the deputy headteacher instead.

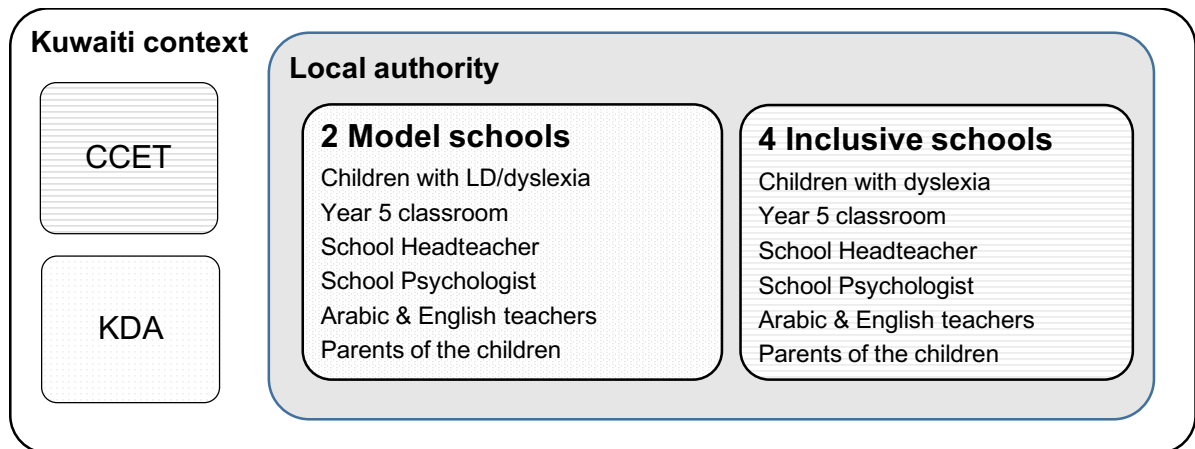


Figure 2: *Study Context and Participants*
 CCET: Center for Child Evaluation & Teaching
 KDA = Kuwaiti Dyslexia Association

Teachers were selected on the basis that their classes contained at least one dyslexic student. This meant that they also would have experienced accommodating children with dyslexia in their classes. In order to better focus this research and probe deeper and with a clearer purpose, I decided to focus on instruction for the subjects of Arabic and English, the reason being because of the nature of dyslexia, as students' difficulties are usually characterised by literacy issues I also took into account the variation of curriculum and pedagogical practices between the two subjects and found that focusing on two subjects was likely to deepen understanding and offer greater detail about particular practices, which a more general survey involving a wider range of subjects might not have done. I also asked the classroom teachers (the Arabic and English teachers) to take part in the interviews.

It was necessary to decide whether to choose a sample of pupils identified with dyslexia across the primary age range or to limit the sample to a cross-section of one year group. I decided to concentrate on a single year group, Year 5 (the oldest year in the primary system, (ages 10 -11). One of the reasons was their enhanced ability for self-expression and perception. Furthermore, students in Year 5 were studying the full range of subjects, so they had the background knowledge to identify in which subjects they struggled or succeeded. The choice of a single year group was also based on including an identified child with dyslexia in the classroom. Also, in the Kuwaiti education system, students are not sent for a diagnosis with a learning difficulty until they have struggled academically for several years, hence the sample size would have been much smaller in younger age groups. Often, students struggling in the early primary years are still permitted to advance through the education system due to the lack of standardised testing and the ease of the curriculum. In 2014, however (after this research had already been undertaken) standardised testing was introduced from Year 1. I interviewed a total of nine children with dyslexia/learning difficulties; however, I was only able to interview four parents who were willing to take part in this study.

To sum up, see Table 1, my sample consisted of six schools, 10 teachers (teaching Arabic and English), five headteachers, one deputy head, and five psychologists. I interviewed nine children, seven children were identified with learning difficulties by Center for Child Evaluation & Teaching (CCET) and two children were identified with dyslexia by the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA). Although I gained permission

from all parents to interview their children, I managed only to interview four parents; most of the interviews (child or parent) generally took between 30 and 45 minutes.

| School | | Child's Name (pseudonym) | Staff interview |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| S Model school | Boys' Model school | Ali | 2 teachers (Arabic + English). 1 Head T+ the school psychologist |
| | | Yaser | |
| JK Model school | Girls' Model school | Reem | 2 teachers (A+E). 1 Head T + the school psychologist |
| | | Dalal | |
| Kh Inclusive Schools | Boys' inclusive School | Abdullah | 2 teachers (A+E). 1 Head T + the school psychologist |
| Q Inclusive School | Boys' inclusive School | Hamad | 2 teachers (A+E). 1 deputy head |
| MD Inclusive School | Girls' inclusive School | Dana | 2 teachers (A+E). 1 Head T + the school psychologist |
| Z Inclusive School | Girls' inclusive School | Afnan | 2 teachers (A+E). 1 Head T + The school psychologist |
| | | Lulwa | |

Table 1: *Study Sample*

3.3 Data Collection Methods

In qualitative research, different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, data collection methods and analysis are employed (Creswell, 2003). The process of data collection, as Creswell (2013) states, is “a series of interrelated activities” practised by the researcher for the purpose to better answer their research questions (p. 146). Table 2 illustrates the relationship between the study research questions, the participants and the data collection methods used.

| Research question | Participants | Data collection methods |
|--|--|--|
| 1-How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait? | | |
| a) How do teachers, students, specialists and parents perceive dyslexia? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents Children | Interviews |
| b) How do policies portray dyslexia? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents | Interviews Documentation |
| 2- How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included? | | |
| c) How are children with dyslexia identified? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents | Interviews |
| d) How are children with dyslexia supported? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents Children | Interviews Documentation Observation |
| e) How are children with dyslexia included? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents Children | Interviews Documentation Observation |
| f) What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents Children | Interviews |
| 3- To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools? | Teachers Headteacher psychologist Parents | Interviews |

Table 2: *Research questions and method alignment*

Access and permission were negotiated with the case study schools, with the headteacher initially consenting to me accessing the school. The aims of the research were introduced to the staff and a presentation was conducted in the classroom for the Year 5 students who were to be observed to avoid any discomfort about the researcher's role in lessons. Individual children were asked whether they were prepared to be included and interviewed. Copies of letters to parents and invitations to interviews are included in Appendix 1.

3.3.1 Cultural Challenges in Data Collection

The recent and quite rapid modernisation of Kuwait has caused a disparity between the once simple and highly social culture, where most people knew each other and strong family ties were harboured, and the metropolitan lifestyle that tries to promote independence and more social detach/privacy. One by-product of such a rapid and ill-formed shift is increased stigmatisation towards learning difficulties as parents struggle between their instinct to protect their child from hardships and ridicule, and the ever-increasing demand for academic success. In a more 'developed' society perhaps there would be less ridicule as people are able to comprehend the negative psychological impact that such behaviour can yield, due to the more mature and 'evolved' nature of said societies. This greatly impeded my work specifically in data collection as parents were hesitant to partake due to their lack of basic understanding of the scientific research methodology, and its inherent confidentiality and ethical promises. Other parents were in-denial or disbelief or perhaps did not have the awareness necessary to understand the nature of their child's difficulty and were thus uncomfortable discussing it. They knew something was wrong, but did not want to discuss it or constantly be reminded of it.

Religion, and religious practice over the years has also contributed to the basis of people's information gathering. For many years and until very recently, the only method of obtaining information was to go to a Mosque and study under a 'mentor' or "Mutawwa" as they are referred to here. This dependence on mentorship has impeded the progress of people's understanding of 'The Scientific Method', and its importance in obtaining factual unbiased knowledge. Not only was I faced with many

instances of people unwilling to accept the scientific realities regarding dyslexia that I presented to them, people seemed unaware of the meticulous nature of scientific research and how accurate its results can be. They seemed more comfortable with the contradictory information that they had heard from what they believed were reliable sources. They clung on to their own extremely varied and often erroneous understandings of their child's problem, which they have most likely obtained from people they deemed trustworthy. They seemed to lack the basic selection criteria as to what a reliable source should be. The biggest obstacle I faced during my data collection due to (in my opinion) this issue was with the CCET and KDA. When presented with the structured and scientific approach of my study, they were extremely reluctant to be quoted on any opinions or understanding. I was referred to pre-written policies that they can safely attribute to someone else without much apprehension regarding its accuracy. Even the policies examined seemed coloured by a general lack of scientific approach, and the 'copy-paste' attitude that was adopted seems to portray this problem in my opinion.

3.3.2 Observations

Observation allows the researcher to collect data from a first-hand perspective on issues relevant to the case (Merriam, 1998). Observation is therefore a useful tool to triangulate emerging themes, rather than being the sole source of data (Merriam, 1998). Observational data enables researchers "to see things that might otherwise be unconsciously missed, and to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 396). Observation was used in this study to obtain information that might not be attained by other methods. This

was particularly important in this study, as dyslexia policy is still at an early stage of development, hence the policies outlined in the documentation were often not evident in real time classroom observations. It was thus essential to compare and differentiate the portrayal from the practice so as to highlight any issues with implementation. Using the observation method enabled me to better understand the context, discover certain elements that were further discussed in the interviews, and to cross-check the information, with the comparison between policy and reality also being a key area for analysis.

Observation can take the form of participant observation or non-participant direct observation. Participant observers engage in activities they observe, while non-participant observers deliberately strive to be as unobtrusive as possible in order to avoid bias (Cohen et al., 2007; Wellington, 2000). I chose to be a non-participant observer to avoid being involved in the situation under observation in order not to influence it. Nonetheless, “it has been argued that all social research is a form of participant observation because we cannot study social life without being part of it” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1994, p.244, cited in Silverman, 2015 p276.).

In this study, I employed semi-structured observation to explore the students and their teachers’ experience of the inclusion of students with dyslexia in mainstream schools. As has been noted, “A semi-structured observation will have an agenda of issues but will gather data to illuminate these issues in a far less predetermined or systematic manner” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 397). This freedom and flexibility was essential in the context of this study, as the infrastructure for dealing with dyslexia was unclear or yet to be established, hence it would have been unclear how to

predetermine observation schedules, as there were no particular teaching methods, student behaviours, or environmental factors to be expected. I created a three-part observation sheet (Appendix 2) which examines the classroom environment, participation of students, and teachers' practice, including curriculum modification and pedagogy.

Classroom Observation Processes

During May 2013, classroom observations were carried out in the selected schools. The observation notes were then presented to the teachers in the interviews to see if they were considered a fair representation of the events observed. This was followed by interviews with staff, students, and parents.

The first part of this study involved classroom observation in Year 5 in all six schools. The purpose of the research was presented as being of interest to all staff, as well as to the students, and to the experiences of Year 5 students more generally. At this point I made no mention of a specific interest in dyslexic pupils (especially to children in the observed classroom). The purpose of this was to avoid singling out dyslexic children in front of their classmates. Furthermore, it was an attempt to preserve the natural classroom atmosphere, so that the teachers would not give certain children special attention or treatment.

Before beginning the observations, I had been supplied with a list of students at each school who had been identified as having specific learning difficulties/dyslexia by the school psychologist. The data was collected from two lessons in each school, each of 35 minutes in duration, one Arabic lesson and one English lesson, using the semi-

structured observation sheet. This meant that a total of 12 observations were carried out.

Whilst I did attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible, the teachers' awareness of my presence was noticeable. It was even noticeable to some of the children, who perceived their teachers as being particularly cautious on that day. While they did not explicitly state this, they instead misinterpreted the teachers' caution as them being "tired", yet this still displays the fact that a change in teachers' behaviour was palpable.

Although the purpose of my presence had been explained, I had to reassure participants that I was not in any way performing an assessment of the teacher, and that they were welcome to take a look at the notes obtained from the observation at any time. These observation notes were not specifically focused on dyslexic pupils, hence avoiding privacy issues. After explaining this, they became very welcoming and highly cooperative. I positioned myself at the back of all classes, in the corner; this allowed for a wide-angle view of the class while also removing me from the students' focus as much as possible. This consideration seemed to be successful, since the students soon appeared to forget my presence and behave as they would have done normally.

Generally, the children accepted my presence and understood my role more easily than the staff, who tended to want to underline that the lesson had been suitable, or wanted to explain their aims to me.

3.3.3 Interviews

This study is partly targeted at obtaining the personal perspectives of participants and recognises the value of conversation between researcher and participants, therefore interviews were a key data collection method. As Kvale (2008) notes, interviews enable researchers to clarify the meaning of what the interviewees say and Cohen et al. (2007) note that interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. Within case study inquiry, it is suggested that data collection can be well served through the use of in-depth, individual interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Rosenberg & Yates, 2007). Therefore, I used individual and in-person interviews with teachers, parents, children, and specialists in order to ask questions, which elicited in-depth responses.

Interview is actually 'inter-view' and 'inter-action' between the interviewer and the interviewee through which knowledge tends to be constructed (Kvale, 2007, p. 1) and follows a structured purpose (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore the topic under investigation and elicit the interviewees' ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) note that semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to ask key questions, then to do some probing for further information, since semi structured interviews benefit from both pre-prepared guiding questions as well as an open-ended format where participants can elaborate on raised issues (Dornyei, 2007, p. 136). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate to use in this study because they afforded a more flexible format for interviews (Noor, 2008). Through the use of semi-

structured interviews, I had an opportunity to individualize the questions while still having a structure for approaching the same data collection (Noor, 2008).

I used semi-structured interviews to allow me to ask sub-questions, thereby ensuring that I covered those topics that would address the research objectives, as well as giving the interviewee a chance to elaborate on the issues which they felt were important (Radnor, 2002). Rich data from the interviews facilitated deeper interpretation of participants' perceptions. The interviews were designed to cover the interviewees' experiences as well as their understanding of the concept of dyslexia. All the interview questions were open-ended.). (see Appendix 3 and 4 for teachers' and headteachers' interview questions)

The interview questions and procedure were developed through piloting the interviews with volunteer Arabic and English teachers in one primary school, which was not included in this study. Piloting the interviews helped me to identify any questions or terms that seemed unclear or difficult to answer by the study participants. It also made me more aware of my own questioning style and interview technique, highlighting areas in which I needed more practice. Practising being a good listener rather than frequent speaker, for example (Creswell, 2013), is important, but might vary depending on how freely interviewees are able to speak.

The goal was also to make the questions brief and simple (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Generally speaking, leading questions were not used in order to avoid influencing respondents' answers in an inappropriate way. In a few cases, however, I followed Kvale's (2009) argument that leading questions may be used to corroborate the information that the interviewee has already given, or in my case the

observation as well. As Bryman (2008, p. 438) states, questions in semi-structured interviews might not necessarily follow what is outlined in the interview guide and I noticed how interviews turned out to be richer when flexibility was permitted in this way. In this study, I held the interviews after the classroom observation, to allow each interviewee to give detailed descriptions of their own experience of the observed lesson.

To support social interaction at the time of the interviews, refreshments were provided, which is an essential aspect of any social interaction in the local culture. I used a digital recorder to enable me to be able to focus on the interviews and allow the data to be captured more accurately.

I attempted to be an active listener (Radnor, 2002) and to encourage the interviewee to talk freely and provide explanations and examples of their opinions. I became more careful about transitioning between major topics, so as to prevent them from feeling that their statements were irrelevant and I was disinterested, and also to attempt to make the interview resemble a regular conversation to the greatest degree possible.

As shown in Table 2, in this study 10 teachers (teaching Arabic and English) were interviewed. I also interviewed five headteachers, one deputy head, and five psychologists. Each interview lasted an average of 50 minutes for teachers and 30-45 minutes for other school staff.

Interviews with children

Students' understanding of the label of dyslexia varies across cases. While some may feel 'relieved' in realizing that 'I'm not stupid or lazy after all' (Riddick et al.,

1997), others may feel ashamed to learn they have an 'internal problem', or an official judgment that 'there's something wrong with me'. Thus, understanding the child's perspective can be challenging due to the various practical and ethical considerations involved in such an undertaking. The key issue was determining the best way to gain insight on the child's perspective while simultaneously fulfilling research aims and accounting for ethical considerations, as outlined in the ethical considerations later in this chapter. In this study, children's perspectives were gained through the use of interviews. The selection of interviews as a method can be attributed to the participants having dyslexia, hence written response would not be the ideal means of self-expression. While questionnaires could have been employed in data collection, it did not appear to be a suitable choice due to the reading involved, which could have caused unnecessary stress and anxiety for participants. Before commencing the student interviews (but after the observation), letters were sent home with all the students detailing the nature of my research. Parental approval was obtained from all the interviewed students and parents were not pressured to take part, as they were made to understand that participation was absolutely optional. They were also reassured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout this whole process, as social stigma surrounding such disabilities is a significant issue in Kuwait. While some parents consented to their child being interviewed, they themselves were often unavailable for undetermined reasons. I a different interview schedule and questions for children (Appendix 5). I conducted nine interviews, each being one-on-one. In an effort to create a more convenient environment for the children, interviews were conducted in the school library, or in

some schools in the psychologist's office. I tried to establish a friendly environment so that the children would feel at ease and feel free to share their perceptions. I asked the interviewed child if he/she would like to draw something while we chatted. All of them seemed pleased to do so. As with all the other interviews, interviews with children were recorded on a portable digital recorder. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. After each interview, I created a secure backup copy of the interview files on my laptop. This was to avoid any accidental loss of interview recordings. The children were informed in advance of the purpose of the study and the possible length of the interviews.

Parent interviews

Several studies highlight the significant role played by parents in assisting children with dyslexia, especially with the difficulties experienced prior to identification, after which specialist help can be enlisted, although this role does of course continue beyond identification (Burden, 2005, Ingesson, 2007). Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars (2000) identified parents as the most influential sources of support. Hence in this study, parents were an essential group of interviewees to be included. Parents from all the schools provided consent for their children's interviews, however some parents were unavailable for interview themselves. Parents were given the freedom to choose the time and location of their interview. This was done through the school psychologist calling to ask parents personally to participate. This was attempted in addition to sending a letter requesting their participation. I had initially expected substantial participation, not imagining any obstacles would prevent this. In the end, however, I only managed to interview four parents, each interview lasting

approximately between 45-60 minutes and being held at the same school their child was enrolled in. This was due to the major reluctance I faced from the parents, possibly due to the cultural implications discussed above in 3.3.1. The parent interview schedule was prepared separately to explore their perceptions and experiences of dyslexia (Appendix 6). The interviewed parents were willing to share their children's experiences and expressed appreciation for giving them the opportunity to voice their views.

3.3.4 Documentation

Yin (1994) states that "documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies" (p.103). He also mentions, however, that it can be difficult to find. Documentation can provide specific details that contradict or corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.

In this study documentation was reviewed to augment and corroborate evidence from the qualitative data gleaned from observations and interviews (see Table 3). To begin with, the documents reviewed could not be described as unbiased, as they promoted specific aspects of the education system (for example, Model schools). Furthermore, documents could not be described as exact, but rather counted a series of vague statements and misinformation. The perceived advantages that documents have broad coverage do not quite apply in this case either, as nationwide policy is yet to be introduced, so documents come from individual schools. Reviewing documentation is often a valid form of data collection, however, in this research, I felt it was mostly useful simply to highlight the stark contrast between institutional declarations and the some of the study findings from the interviews.

The inclusive schools did not have policy documents for review. The only document obtained from one of these schools was a statement from the KDA for one of the dyslexic children. Their lack of policy documents reflects the greater attitude of the country as a whole towards dyslexia. The Model schools however, did have policy documents, which they claimed as their own. Upon examination, the documents were identical down to the last detail, with only the school logo being changed. This again sheds light on the cultural challenges faced by dyslexic students, namely the 'copy-paste' attitude employed by the governing bodies, and the lack of sufficient personalised or tailored research and documentation on such a crucial matter. This perhaps added to the stigmatisation faced by these children, and made it more challenging to approach the parents, staff and students themselves with such a topic. In summary, then, the data collection methods involved document review, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation (triangulation of methods); see Table 3 below.

| | Observation & field notes | Interviews with Headteacher and school psychologist | Interviews with teachers | Interviews with children | Interviews with parents | Documentation |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| S Model school | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | 1 HT 1 psychologist | Arabic teacher 45 mins-English teacher 40 mins | Ali &Yasser | Alis's mother Yasser's mother | Policy of the Model school Statements |
| JK Model school | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | 1 HT 1 psychologist | Arabic teacher 52 mins- English teacher 48 mins | Reem&Dalal | None | Policy of the Model school Statements |
| Kh inclusive School | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | 1 HT 1 psychologist | Arabic teacher 44 mins- English teacher 65 mins | Abdullah | Abdullah's mother | None |
| Q Inclusive School | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | Deputy HT | Arabic teacher 48 mins English teacher 40 mins | Hamad | None | None |
| Kh inclusive School | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | 1 HT 1 psychologist | Arabic teacher 67 mins- English teacher 53 mins | Dana | None | None |
| Z inclusive School | 1 Arabic lesson 1 English lesson | 1 HT 1 psychologist | Arabic teacher 53 mins- English teacher 45 mins | Afnan&Lulwa | Afnan's mother | None |

Table 3: Data collection methods and participants in the study

3.3.5 Triangulation

Yin (2014) states that although in some case studies “the phenomenon of interest may be participants’ distinctive meaning or perception. Triangulation would still be important, to ensure that the case study had rendered the participants perspective accurately” (p. 122). Triangulation, according to Yin, is the use of multiple sources of evidence. Triangulation is helpful in defending the validity of the research and mitigating research and respondent bias (Robson, 2002). Both methods and sources in this study were triangulated to enhance the reliability of the data and conclusions. The research methods comprised document analysis (policy, statements), semi-structured interviews (with Arabic and English teachers, parents, children, and professionals) and classroom observations (Year 5, Arabic and English lessons), all encompassed by a triangulation strategy. These methods were used to collect data from diverse sources, which would also reflect the diversity in participant perceptions, as well as to compare and contrast institutional statements with practice. It was particularly important in this case to use a variety of sources, as it is still a relatively unknown area of enquiry in Kuwait, hence single types of sources in isolation were not likely to yield sufficient amounts of data.

3.4 Ethical considerations

All research stages tend to give rise to ethical issues (Miller and Brewer, 2003). These vary from the selection of the topic and the planning of the research design, to the actual conduct of the study; the procedures of data collection, data analysis and data storage; the presentation of the findings, the relationships with participants, etc. (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative researchers are required to explore “the

rightness or wrongness” of their research in relation to the people whose lives are studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.20). Such ethical considerations seem to be imperative in qualitative research because it is a dynamic process which often involves an intrusion into the most intimate and sensitive matters in peoples’ lives (Punch, 2000, p. 281, cited in Grix, 2004).

Acting ethically is no longer only a matter of the personal initiative of the researcher to behave in the participants’ best interest, however (Piper & Simons, 2005). The increased interest in the ethical aspects of conducting research has led to the establishment of “codes of ethics, ethical standards or guiding principles” which contain rules about behaving properly (Yin, 2011, p.39). The essential elements in ethical approaches to educational research include responsibilities to participants, voluntary informed consent, no deception, the right to withdraw, vulnerability of children and others, incentives, detriment, privacy, disclosure, and ethical record-keeping (BERA, 2011). This section will outline the ways in which this study attempted to comply with such ethical considerations.

Ethical guidelines and the associated committees draw on normative ethics, which are concerned with norms of typical appropriate behaviour according to which people should conform (Newman & Brown, 1996; Perle, 2004). Requesting consent to include an individual in a research project, for example, seems to be valued as good practice axiologically because it supports the right of the participant to autonomy and self-determination. Since consent is considered a respected value, researchers have the deontological duty to protect participants by asking their permission to involve them in research. “Values and duties are officially systematised as sets of norms of

ethical action in Codes of Ethical Guidelines (e.g. British Educational Research Association [BERA] ethical guidelines) or they are embodied in legislation” (Bayliss & Thoma, 2008, p.5). Ethics approval for this study, for example, was obtained from the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Appendix 7). Guidelines, such as the BERA guidelines, were very useful, especially to a first-time researcher.

With the above-mentioned guidelines in mind, I requested permission for conducting this study in the school from the local authority. After obtaining this permission, I met with the school headteacher, to whom I explained the purpose of the study. I requested permission from the parents of the students as well as asking parents of children with dyslexia to take part in the study interviews. I was permitted to meet with the Arabic and English teachers working in the observed classrooms. I obtained the parents’/guardians’ consent for all participating children. In addition I gained consent from the participants (school staff) to conduct this research and provided them with information about the aims of the study (Appendix 8). Subsequently, I met with the students and explained the goals of the study to them through a PowerPoint brief presentation (Appendix 9). According to the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines, “researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand and agree to the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is important and how it will be used” (p. 5).

Thus, in this study, participants were informed of the purpose and context of the study and were happy to actively participate in the interviews. As well as having the right to refuse to take part, participants were eligible to withdraw once the research

had begun for any or no reason (BERA, 2011). My research thus acknowledged that informed consent entailed the possibility of “informed refusal” (Cohen et al., 2007a, p.52) as an ongoing process.

Furthermore, prior to the start of the interviews it was explained to the participants that they had the right to decline to respond to any questions they did not feel like answering or use the stop/pause button of the portable digital recorder at any time. In this way, participants were given absolute control over the recording process (Oliver, 2010) and were protected from stress or discomfort when talking about certain issues. The ethical stance of the present study desired that participants express their opinion freely and take decisions for issues that concern them by engaging in a role of active participation (Alderson, 2000).

The study was outlined to Year 5 students as being focused on the typical experiences of the year group with no specific mention of an interest in dyslexia. If key participants, particularly dyslexic children, had been discretely selected for individual interviews they were separately asked whether they would be prepared to contribute. Alderson (2000) believes that the most important participation right is the child’s right to express a view.

While attempts were made not to distract class proceedings during observation, naturally teachers were impacted by my presence, with children noticing a change in teacher behaviour, as highlighted earlier in this chapter. I tried to alleviate this by ensuring that my presence was clearly explained to teachers and students, for them to understand this was not a teacher assessment exercise, and should they wish to review observation notes, they were welcome to do so.

Mishan et. al. (2004) mention the differences between children and adults in terms of power dynamics and stress giving children freedom to refuse to participate. In this study, I decided that I would meet with students individually to explain the goals of the study to them, to introduce myself personally, and ask if they had any objections. These meetings were held outside the classroom environment in a more comfortable and informal settings, in an attempt to offset some of the overarching connotations of the power structure that come with the classroom setting. These locations included the library and extracurricular activity rooms. When researching/working with children, the key issues addressed are “access and consent, the context in which research is conducted, confidentiality and protection, and debriefing and rewards” (Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010, cited in Lichtman, 2013, p. 62)

The study proceeded to acknowledge that participants (parents in particular) shared personal aspects of their lives and gave increased emphasis to the protection of the participants’ privacy throughout all the research stages. “The more sensitive, intimate or discrediting the information, the greater is the obligation on the researcher’s part to make sure that guarantees of confidentiality are carried out” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 65). They argue that because such research involves face-to-face interviewing, inevitably, the researcher knows the identities of the participants. Assurances of full and strict confidentiality were provided in my research. No connections between personal information and identities were made publicly (ibid.); rather, participants were assured that their names or any other personal details would not be used. “Masking techniques” such as pseudonyms for names of people, were employed (De Laine, 2000, p.172) whilst other personal

identifiers were either deleted or reported more generally (Frankfort- Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

During the undertaking of research, a balance must be struck between society's desire to uncover hidden pressures at play and the need to protect the privacy of individuals. This comes with the understanding that there are spheres into which a social scientist is not entitled to enter (Barnes, 1979, cited in Bulmer, 2001, p. 49). Given the measures outlined in this chapter, the study did not cause offence to any participants and it sought to be as non-intrusive as possible, allowing privacy to be respected.

3.5 Data analysis methods and procedure

Different analysis stages were applied to the qualitative data coming from the semi-structured observations first, since these were the first data collection tool. Semi-structured interviews followed, then documents. The triangulation of research methods led to the collection of a vast amount of data, which had to be interconnected and organised in order to develop themes. This approach is recommended by Rubin and Rubin (1995) to help to "build toward a broader description or an overall theory" (1995, p. 234).

It was highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006) that qualitative research must be clear about any assumptions including what was done, why and how and the epistemological stance taken (social constructionist). As a social constructionist the analysis examines the way in which realities, meanings and experiences are made sense of and are produced through the effects of discourses and their social context. In the participants' interviews, for example, I looked out closely for the various

constructions of particular objects, events and experiences that were being constructed. The underlying epistemology do not attempt for a singular objective and universal truth. There is not an attempt to make sense of participants' complex perceptions and experiences through a demand to the inner truth inhabiting within them. Rather the focus on the multiple subjectivities and how these are made possible through participants' views and their socio-cultural contexts (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

After identifying the major categories (the ways in which these categories were developed will be explained in later sections), the observations, the interview transcripts, and documents were analysed by applying the same categorisation system to obtain additional supporting data.

All data was initially transcribed, where necessary, then imported from a word-processing programme into NVivo10, a text- sorting programme designed to support qualitative data analysis. After this, the data was coded and analysed according to the 'analysis technique' introduced by Creswell (2013) for qualitative data analysis, as will be presented in detail in the following section. Although I drew upon Creswell's (2013) steps for analysing my data, I did not follow these exactly. In other words, I amended these steps in a way that best fitted with my data and which I as a researcher felt could better help the analysis, as will be shown in the following section.

Creswell (2013) stated that researchers go through different steps for data analysis, which he called a 'data analysis spiral'. This means the researcher engages in a process of moving in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach to

analyse his/her data. Following Creswell's (2013) steps, I used five different steps in the procedure of analysing the data: organising the data, reading and note-making, describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and categories, interpreting the data, and representing and visualising the data. These steps will be discussed in detail in the next section. I did not, however, follow the 'spiral' method exactly.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Managing and organising the data for analysis

Data management, the first loop in Creswell's (2013) spiral of data analysis, begins the process. At an early stage in the process of analysing data, researchers organise their data into computer files. These files can then be converted to appropriate text units (e.g. a word, a sentence, an entire story) for analysis, either by hand (manually) or by computer (ibid, 182). This could include organising the documents or a visual data for review or transcribing text from interviews and observation into word processing files for analysis. In fact, when I observed the teachers, I took all of my notes in English to make it easier for myself to later on analyse the data. Regarding the interviews, all of them were conducted in Arabic (participants' L1), then I listened to each interview, transcribed it word by word into Arabic. I then translated the data into English, with a fellow Arabic-speaking researcher at Exeter providing a review, to ensure that the data preserved the original meaning.

Cohen et al. (2007) claim that there is no one 'correct' transcribing method; instead this is defined by the purposes and usefulness of the study. In this study, all audio recordings were transcribed with accuracy and sensitivity in terms of what was said and using the exact wording (and punctuation marks: full stops, commas, question

marks, exclamation marks, or capital letters for emphasis, etc.) of the participants in order to represent as much as possible the meaning that participants attributed to their words through speech. Moreover, the transcripts were double-checked against the original recording to avoid the potential for misinterpretation. After that, each transcript was translated into English to ease the process of data analysis. In doing so, I used 'meaning transcription' where the focus was on the meaning of participants' words (Kvale, 2014).

"During the transcription process, the researcher checks the transcription for accuracy and then enters it into a qualitative data analysis software program" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 206). Because there is a potential for data loss, reduction, distortion, or even the imposition of the researcher's personal presumptions on the transcript, transcribing is an important stage in research (Cohen et al., 2007). Some researchers suggest that this is an issue, as understandings of the researcher could replace or even 'do something' to the original research data (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Nevertheless, if we think of transcribing as a mediating practice, the same can be thought of audio recording, which provides a partial rendering of what happened by omitting non-verbal elements (ibid.). Similarly, interviewing can often provide a partial representation of the participants' original experience, since "data collection is inescapably a selective process" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this sense, every aspect of the study involves a mediated practice. Since mediation is inevitable, transcription is not the first nexus of interpretation, as the data itself is already a mediated construct. 'Rather, transcription

is perhaps best thought of as a re-mediation of a mediated view' (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.125).

In relation to the documents, these were read and translated into English to prepare them for data analysis. Having done this, all my observation, interview transcripts, and documents were entered into NVivo10, a word-processing programme. I prepared the main project in NVivo10 and created six different files for the six schools that I worked with during my study. Each of these files contained a number of documents, including all the data I collected from each school. File (1) was for S Model school, for example, and in this file I had 2 observation schedules, 8 interview transcripts and the school policy for documentary analysis.

3.5.2 Reading and note-making

Following the organisation of the data, researchers continue their analysis by trying to make sense of the whole database (Creswell, 2013). This involves "reading through all of the data to develop a general understanding of the database" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.207). Agar (1980) recommends, for example, that researchers "read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get sense of the interview as whole before breaking it in to parts" (cited in Creswell, 2013, p.183). This may also include writing notes or memos in the margins of field notes or transcripts to help in the initial process of exploring the database (ibid). I initially read through all the translated interviews and transcripts line by line in hard copy Word documents to understand the meaning of the text and information provided by the participant on the investigated issues. Then some labels were generated from the text and marked by adding comments in the right-hand

margin. This process helped me to start looking at the data and start to gain experience of analysing the data. Then, I read through the first school file, where I read the observation schedules, the transcripts and the document line by line for each data source. Afterwards, I started writing memos into my NVivo10 observation schedules, transcripts and documents. This was done by recording the questions, assumptions or any ideas in relation to the investigated issues in the NVivo10 memos. When reading participants responses regarding their understanding of dyslexia in the interview transcript, for instance, I wrote some questions and ideas to make sense of participants' responses and to help me later on in coding and categorising the data. This stage has no interpretive intentions; rather it is open to the identification of multiple concepts, regardless of whether they had already been referred to in literature.

3.5.3 Describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes

The next step involves moving from reading and making notes on the data to describing, classifying and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013). At this stage, forming codes represents the heart of analysing qualitative data where the researcher builds detailed descriptions, develops themes or dimensions, and starts providing interpretations in the light of his/her view or according to the literature (ibid). This stage involves coding the data, dividing the text into small units (phrases, sections, or paragraphs), assigning a label to each unit, and then grouping the codes into categories or themes. The coding label can come from the exact words of the participants, phrases composed by the researcher, or concept used in the social or human sciences" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 208).

Coding resembled the inductive coding techniques proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990, cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994), however it would be a mistake to suggest that a grounded theory approach was employed. Instead, I developed a different coding approach, borrowing elements from the work of Strauss and Corbin (ibid.), as well as Miles and Huberman (1994). After all, according to some scholars, “coding and analysis of qualitative data cannot be systematised or taught. It is an interpretive process that necessarily involves creativity and subjectivity” (Benaquisto & Given, 2008, p. 88). My creativity and subjectivity in the data analysis process was present through the process of starting my coding by writing comments on the margins of one of the interview transcripts, as mentioned earlier, to understand and get used to the data analysis and coding process.

Moreover, in preparation for first level coding, I closely read the text and reviewed the data line by line in NVivo10. This is called ‘annotations’ in NVivo10, where the researcher can annotate words or phrases in the text, like a comments field or footnote in Word (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Consideration was given to the embedded meanings and the identification of text segments that hold meaningful units. Labels were then generated for these segments and marked through numbered annotations. These labels were the first level codes and were attached to “chunks” of text of varying size (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56), assigning descriptive information (see coded interview transcript example in Appendix 10). The second level codes were initially marked beside the first level codes, using different colour-coding stripes while annotating to avoid confusion.

In the third level, codes explore the relationships between the second level codes and examine whether they can fit into broader categories. At this level, labels are usually borrowed from theoretical propositions. Table 4 below illustrates an example of the different levels of coding

| 3 rd Level | 2 nd Level | 1 st Level |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Medical model | Illness | "It is an illness that entails difficulty in reading and its symptoms are quite apparent."(Q-I-DH-interview). |
| | Treatable | "Dyslexia is not disabled, he only has a problem which can be treated" (S-M-Ali's Mother's Interview) |
| | | "The availability of suitable, early treatment provides the affected individuals... to overcome their learning difficulties" (Model school Policy) |
| Nature of difficulty | Dis/ability to read | "A child who has a number of difficulties; most of them are related to his ability to read"(S-M-AT Interview). |
| | Reading and writing difficulties | "Difficulties in reading will create difficulties in other areas, such as writing, or distinguishing between words and letters"(S-M-ET Interview). |

Table 4: *Different levels of coding*

During the interview, for instance, participants were asked about their understandings and perceptions of dyslexia and an Arabic teacher answered: "A child who has a number of difficulties; most of them are related to his ability to read"(S-M-AT Interview). I coded this quote as 'dis/ability to read'. Similarly, the English teacher stated: "Difficulties in reading will create difficulties in other areas, such as writing, or distinguishing between words and letters"(S-M-ET Interview). This led me to code this extract as 'reading and writing difficulties'. Consequently, it seemed to me that these codes could be grouped under one category that I called

'nature of difficulty'. All these codes seemed to be related to a broader category that I called 'understanding dyslexia' which was generated from my first research question "How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?"

3.5.4 Interpreting the data

Researchers engage in interpreting the data when they conduct qualitative research. (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). This step involves making sense of the data to see what lessons have been learnt from it. This means abstracting out beyond the codes and categories/themes to the broader meaning of the data (ibid). Interpretation here is important, as it can provide similar explanations of the results but with few differences. Qualitative researchers like me need to address how the research questions were answered and show their findings from such qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). At this stage I tried to make sense of my data to understand it and interpret it in relation to all my research questions. The categories/themes identified in the previous stage also helped me at this stage to perceive key issues relating to my research questions which may not be quantifiable (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Moreover, it helped me in the in-depth understanding of each type of school separately as a result of deep analysis using displays, allowing systematic comparisons over specific issues among the different schools that were part of the study.

3.5.5 Representing and visualising the data

In the final phase of the spiral, researchers represent their data as a package of what has been found in texts, tables or figure forms (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). In other words, representing the findings in the qualitative research involve "a discussion of

the evidence for the themes or categories; the presentation of figures that depict the physical setting of the study; or a diagram presenting frameworks, models or theories.” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 209). Three major themes/categories were generated from the data, for example; each of these was presented in a table showing the three levels of coding (see Table 5 in the following chapter, which is about categorising understandings of dyslexia). This was the last stage of my data analysis. After I finished analysing my data, I took the issues further into my discussion chapter.

3.6 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research in which researchers “strive for understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 201), validity and reliability are superseded by some alternative terms. Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research can be substituted for the terms validity and reliability, whilst Seale (1999) points out the significance of examining reliability and validity, with trustworthiness making up the core of these issues (1999, p. 266). The notion of ‘trustworthiness’ in qualitative research allows the researcher to demonstrate the worth of the research (Given and Saumure, 2008, p. 896).

Creswell and Miller (2000, p.126) suggest a number of validation strategies which may vary according to the researcher’s pragmatic assumptions, e.g. “Triangulation’ and thick, rich descriptions”. Jensen (2008, p. 886) also identified two strategies targeted at improving the quality of qualitative research, these being, “thick description” and “purposeful sampling”. ‘Thick description’ entails enhancing the credibility of the research. The qualitative researcher can do this through giving

detailed descriptions the setting, participants and the themes of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). In this study, I attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the context and have provided a full account of participants. Participants were selected on the basis of their consistency with my research design and aims, with the same applying to the selection of the local authority and schools. Furthermore, I collected detailed and genuine data on participants in their own natural contexts in a non-intrusive manner.

Referring back to the validation strategies mentioned earlier that are needed in qualitative research, Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative research needs at least two of the validation strategies. In this study, I ensured the quality of my research through the following ways: Triangulation, as a technique to improve trustworthiness, involves the use of multiple and different sources of data through multiple methods and lenses (Ritchie, 2003). The triangulation methods adopted in this study allowed me to collect the data using multiple methods for the purpose of “strengthening” the findings and “enriching” the interpretations (Rothbauer, 2008, p. 892). The variety of data collection methods used was an asset to the credibility of the study. Creswell (2013) states that data should be verified through different sources by bringing together evidence from all sources and binding it to create a comprehensive reasoning for themes. If agreement on themes is established using various data resources or participant views, then these procedures can credibly add to the value of the research.

In addition, I aimed to have clear and well-defined methods of data collection. The semi-structured interview questions, for example, were developed in English and

were later translated into Arabic, the mother-tongue in Kuwait. I ensured the validity of this translation through discussing the questions with a colleague from Kuwait who is an Arabic teacher to double check the translation of the questions. We did this by me stating the meaning of the question and he then checked how it would be stated in Arabic. Back-translation followed, which consists of translating the interview from English to Arabic, then a second translator translates the Arabic translation back into English and the two are compared.

Moreover, Creswell (2013) clarifies that in-depth descriptions of findings should be provided to help readers to envisage the context and allow them to participate in the experience, which can also enhance the validity of the research. I did this with all the findings of my research, as I have discussed them in-depth in relation to the context in Kuwait and the international literature.

3.7 Fieldwork reflections

Certain challenges were experienced in this research, despite its careful consideration and design. Some parents were unavailable or difficult to reach, for example; one problem arising from this was that they may have consented to their children's interview but not their own, thus impacting the depth of the views I was able to gain from parents. Another issue was that the only documentation made available to me was the Model school's Policy, as well as a sample of a child's statement, which was identical in the two Model schools. Weak cooperation from parents and some school staff may have been due to the pressures of the school's workload, stigma, and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Other challenges were encountered linguistically. Several educational concepts do not have an internationally recognised translation; for example, the translation 'dyslexia' from English to Arabic does not fully preserve the meaning; in Kuwait, it would be understood as a 'limitation of reading' or 'learning difficulty'. To preserve accuracy and trustworthiness, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2006) suggest the use of 'back-translation' in designing interview schedules, which was employed in my study. Research rarely progresses precisely as planned (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). In my case, I needed to modify my sample in order to better represent the context.

3.8 Chapter summary

The research methodology has been presented in this chapter and linked to the theoretical framework of the research, which associated the aims to the questions, identifying what data was collected, how, and from whom. Moreover, the procedure used in analysing the data has been explained to improve the coherence of the findings emerging from the current study. In Chapter 4, the findings generated from the research will be presented.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The analysis of the current study aims to present the perceptions of dyslexia, along with the implication of identification, support, and the inclusion of children with dyslexia, while also reflecting the perceptions and experiences of staff, students, and parents in mainstream primary schools.

The findings presented come from two types of primary schools in the same local authority, as well as four Inclusive schools and two Learning Difficulties Model schools. The terms dyslexia and learning difficulty will be employed alongside each other and alternatively on occasion. This will occur because both terms are in use in Kuwait to express what is understood as a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) in the UK. Different levels of analysis revealed three main thematic findings related to the research questions: Understanding of dyslexia, understanding of practice, and the daily challenges in regards to accommodating students with dyslexia (see Table 5). These themes will be subsequently discussed.

The first theme, understanding of dyslexia, gives a general overview of the research participants' perceptions (related to RQ1). The second theme, understanding of practice, demonstrates the identification of dyslexia, along with the support provided for children with dyslexia based on the participants' perspectives, as well as classroom observation and the general inclusion of children with dyslexia and 'learning difficulties' in Kuwaiti schools (related to RQ2). The third theme is in regards to the difficulties facing the implementation of inclusion and dyslexia support in the Kuwaiti education system. While this was not included in the initial research questions, its frequent occurrence in the data obliged its discussion. The findings

were generally presented according to the school from which the data originated from. The first theme was, however, organised according to the data. This was done in order to facilitate analysis since the focus was participant understanding of the concept. The two Model schools had the same policy, so I will refer to this without specifying which school it comes from.

I requested policy documents regarding diagnosis from the inclusive schools. It emerged that no such documentation existed for inclusive schools, however, and while the Model schools had formulated their own policy with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education, this was not the case with inclusive schools.

It is interesting to note that analysis of interviewee's responses showed that not a single member of staff participating in the research mentioned any policy related to SEN, inclusion or learning difficulty. Schools, however, provided a relevant source of information. It is logical to expect that Model school staff would inform teachers about school policy.

Regarding research question 3: "What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices?" there were interview questions which related to Dyslexia Friendly Schools (DFS). The findings went on to reveal that none of the participants had heard about DFS. This will be presented in the discussion chapter.

| Theme | Related research questions: |
|---|---|
| Understanding of dyslexia | 1) How is dyslexia understood in primary school education in Kuwait? |
| | How do teachers, students, specialists and parents perceive dyslexia? |
| | How do policies portray dyslexia? |
| Understanding of practice | 2) How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included? |
| | How are children with dyslexia identified? |
| | How are children with dyslexia supported? |
| | How are children with dyslexia included? |
| | What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices? |
| Daily challenges in regards to accommodating students with dyslexia | This theme emerged from the data and it was indirectly connected to RQ2 |

Table 5: Research Questions 1 & 2

4.2 Understanding of dyslexia: How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait? (Related to RQ1)

This theme presents the differing perspectives and understandings of dyslexia, as described and experienced by school staff, students with dyslexia and their parents. It also describes how dyslexia is portrayed in the documents (Model school policy and statements). This was done in order to address the first research question. For this theme, data will thus be presented as classified by school type, as this will allow me to display each particular school type's perceptions. Since participants had different personal concepts of dyslexia, their replies are arranged within the following sub-themes: nature of difficulty, medical model, and normality (see Table 6).

| 3 rd level codes | 2 nd level codes |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Nature of difficulty | 1. Learning difficulty |
| | 2. Reading difficulty. a- Difficulty reading and ability to read b- Reading and writing c- Reverses and confusion |
| | 3. A number of difficulties |
| | 4. Memory issues |
| | 5. Sensory issues |
| Medical model | 1-Internal |
| | 2-Illness |
| | 3- Treatable |
| Normality | 1- Normal appearance |
| | 2-What it's not a- Not a disability b- Not stupid or lazy |

Table 6: Categorising the understandings of dyslexia

In the following section (4.2.1), I shall attempt to describe what is meant by dyslexia and learning difficulties, according to the research data. Study participants used many different terms to define dyslexia. The terms drawn from the data were categorised in order to provide a coherent structure, as well as to avoid the creation of new labels.

4.2.1 Nature of the difficulty

The interviewees used different terms to describe dyslexia. They also showed differing personal conceptualisations in regards to the nature of dyslexia.

The terms used were not necessarily discrete, with participants often holding multiple, overlapping views of dyslexia, and thus participants often provided data for

multiple categories. These perceptions will be presented individually, and their origins, whether from documentation, teachers, parents or students, will be discussed as well.

Learning difficulty

Analysis of the interviews reveals that the most commonly used term in the Kuwaiti context for dyslexia is 'learning difficulty'. In discussing the concept of dyslexia, participants often replied using the term learning difficulty as opposed to dyslexia. The term 'learning difficulties' is, however, not limited to dyslexia, since as it implies, it could be used to describe various types of learning difficulties.

Inclusive schools

Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA) statements provided for two dyslexic students at Inclusive School Z reportedly used the English term 'dyslexia' to refer to the cases. This was reported by the parents of the students. While they did not actually provide the statements, they did appear familiar with the term based on these statements.

Participants

Some teachers discussed their inability to distinguish between 'learning difficulties' and some other types of SEN when defining dyslexia. They also compared learning difficulties with other types of SEN, particularly when the child's needs were related to literacy skills. Some teachers stated, for instance, that they found the distinction between 'slow learners' and those with 'learning difficulties' problematic. English teachers from inclusive schools stated "we are struggling to distinguish between students who have learning difficulties and students who are slow learners" (Kh-I-ET

interview). Another teacher expressed a similar view when questioned on her ability to identify students with dyslexia:

It is difficult to distinguish between slow learners and those with learning difficulties because the symptoms are similar, and therefore it can only be diagnosed by psychological examination (Q-I-ET interview).

Another teacher stated that:

Students with learning difficulties are not like autistic children in their appearance... I think learning difficulties differ from Down's syndrome! (Z-I-ET interview).

Because literacy skills are closely related to academic achievement, it is possible that teachers may have seen weakness in this regard as being more closely related to poor performance instead of to a specific difficulty. Teachers also often compared and contrasted dyslexia with other types of SEN rather than defining dyslexia itself. The term 'learning difficulties', however, was used to describe students with dyslexia as opposed to 'slow learners' or children with Down's syndrome or autism. Data regarding the understanding of students themselves was not collected in interviews. This is because prompting students to discuss or label their learning difficulties seemed inappropriate.

Model schools

Policy

The term 'learning difficulty' was used for all the reports and statements in the two Model schools. One of the Model schools described its status in the state and used the term learning difficulty to define itself: "the first centre in Kuwait and the Gulf states for treating learning difficulties" (S-M- Documents). Similarly, for the other Model school, the term 'learning difficulty' was the term used in all their documents.

This was the case, for example, in outlining the school objectives, which read as follows: “To provide an opportunity for those suffering from learning difficulties to may receive the specialised education they need in order to address the specific aspects of weakness they have, while continuing to study the school’s curriculum.” (JK-M- Documents).

The policies of the two schools were, however, identical, save for the logo and the introductory information about the schools themselves. As these are the same, excerpts will be presented together. The Model school’s policy also stressed the difference between ‘learning difficulties’ and other types of SEN. It even considered the confusion as one in several “common mistakes regarding learning difficulties” stating:

We should not confuse learning difficulties with mental disabilities, slow learning, blindness, deafness, or behavioural disorders, since none of these conditions are considered learning difficulties (Policy/School Protocol Documents)

Participants

According to the interview data, most of the school teachers used the term ‘learning difficulties’ as a substitute and/or equivalent to dyslexia. An Arabic teacher defined dyslexia stating: “It is a learning difficulty.” (MD-I-AT interview). Similarly, when describing the characteristics of children with dyslexia, a teacher from a Model school addressed: “My judgment is that students have learning difficulties, and not that they are trouble makers or lazy.” (S-M-AT interview)

The use of the term learning difficulty in these schools could be explained by the fact that many of the current staff have undergone specific training courses as part of the Model school initiative. The use of this term may also be influenced by the school

environment. In both training and the school environment, the term 'learning difficulty' would have been widely used to identify and deal with children who have reading, writing, spelling and maths difficulties.

Despite taking care not to mention the term dyslexia or anything that could be related to the child's difficulty, one of the Model school student's statements about himself surprised me. He said "I came here because I have a learning difficulty, I can't read and write well, also I used to fail in the previous years, but not anymore as I told you." (S-M- Yasser interview). Seeking more explanation, I asked "What do you mean by learning difficulties?" He replied, "How can I explain it to you? It's a school for pupils who do not know how to read and write. That's how I understand it, and that is why I am here". He later went on to add that "this is a learning difficulties school."

It must be mentioned that the Model schools do not classify the type of learning difficulty, especially not in the first statement and/or diagnosis provided to the student. This might have an influence on the participants' response regarding their understanding of the word dyslexia, particularly if they were not made aware of the term to begin with. Abdullah had been transferred to a Model school after undergoing a diagnosis that resulted in the label of 'learning difficulties'. He went on to decide to go back to his old school as he missed his friends there. Abdullah mentioned that a 'learning difficulty' label was the reason behind his parents moving him to the Model school: "I was transferred to this school because I have learning difficulty" (Kh-I- interview). When asked about the meaning of 'Learning difficulty', he answered: "I used to fail, I cannot read properly and my writing is not so good."

Dyslexia was seen as a learning difficulty in both model and inclusive Schools, which also reflects a wider adoption of the term throughout the country. It is the fundamental term around which the Model schools policy documents are centred, and is thus in mainstream usage within that context. In inclusive schools, although an official ratification of the term had yet to emerge, it appeared to be in use amongst the staff. While documentation appeared to be firmly based upon a singular usage of the term, participant responses displayed a diversity in background training and previously held conceptions of the term. As such, there was a greater variety in their understanding of dyslexia. Students at the Model school appeared to be much more aware of and forthcoming with the term learning difficulties. This can be explained by the fact that they have undergone a series of tests and diagnoses, and also the fact that they attend a school known for its specialization in learning difficulties. Thus, students appeared more comfortable with the label. This understanding was not reflected in data collected from inclusive school students, who did not mention any such terms.

Reading difficulty

It is worthwhile to note that the Arabic term for dyslexia is literally translated as 'reading difficulty'. Consequently, staff perceptions of dyslexia centred on a student's difficulty in regards to reading, as well as the student's ability to read. Writing ability was linked with this sometimes, but not always monitored. Participants also viewed students' ability to read in differing ways, with some staff members holding the view that such students were unable to read at all.

Inclusive schools

A deputy headteacher admitted that she did not have extensive knowledge on dyslexia, but she was aware that it was a reading difficulty: “I have not researched this condition, but I can say that a child has difficulties reading.” (Q-I- DH interview)

In a similar manner, the following was stated by the school psychologist: “They are the students that are suffering from difficulties in reading.” (Kh-I-Ps interview). This was also stated by the Model school psychologist “It is where there is a difficulty in reading.” (MD-I-Ps Interview). Other education professionals stated outright that dyslexic children were unable to read: “All I know about dyslexia is that the student is unable to read” (Kh-I-ET interview). A parallel belief was expressed by a school headteacher, who said: “There are students who struggle when they read – in other words they can’t read, although they do not have sight problems.” (Z-I-HT interview)

This focus on the ability to read was further reflected in the students’ perceptions of each other. For example, Abdullah described the struggle that his classmates face as follows: “We have students who do not know how to read, and if they tried to read a single sentence they do so with great difficulty” (Kh-I-Interview).

Model schools

Within the specialised Model schools, staff members consistently linked dyslexia with the issue of reading. They went on to suggest that the child with dyslexia is perceived as being unable to read.

For example one Model school headteacher stated: “They denote the pupils who can’t read, who have reading difficulties.” (S-M- HT interview) The school psychologist is responsible for testing and identifying students, and as such, it was

interesting to observe that she had the same perception regarding dyslexia: “Some students try hard to read, but they can't.” (S-M- Ps Interview). An English teacher believed that reading difficulties in a child with dyslexia would result in difficulty writing, as well as in other areas.: “Difficulties in reading will create difficulties in other areas, such as writing, or distinguishing between words and letters.” (S-M- ET Interview). She also highlighted the need for a teaching assistant: “He/she will not be able to read on his/her own. They need assistance in order to read.” (S-M- ET interview). Another teacher described a child with dyslexia as: “An intellectual child, but one who is unable to read on his own and needs assistance in order to be able to do this.” (JK-M- ET interview) This need for assistance was highlighted by these two teachers only.

At the school leadership level, however, it was acknowledged that dyslexia was more varied. One headteacher stated: “They are individual cases, they are not all same, and each pupil has their own ability to read.” (S-M- HT interview) She also highlighted the fact that that giving a fixed definition of dyslexia is not possible: “We can't give fixed properties or descriptions. We have about 100 students here, each with their own behaviour and personality.” (S-M- HT interview). She stated, nevertheless, that dyslexic children were unable to read upon being questioned regarding defining characteristics of dyslexia. Despite the fact that some educators hold a more nuanced view, in the sense that they believe that each case of dyslexia has different manifestations, it appears that the common factor uniting them all, at least in the eyes of the study's participants, was a difficulty or inability to read.

Findings

Reading and writing

Inclusive schools

Some teachers agreed that a child with dyslexia would face other difficulties in addition to reading such as writing. A school psychologist said, in regards to dyslexia, that: “I believe that they have difficulties reading and writing words” (Kh-I-Psychologist Interview). Similarly, an English teacher mentioned the same difficulties when it came to her point of view regarding dyslexia, by saying: “They have some with difficulty in reading, writing and comprehension” (M-I-ET Interview). This English teacher added a further dimension of text comprehension, rather than decoding correct pronunciation, which was implied in the other teachers’ use of the word ‘reading’

Concerns about writing were also expressed by some students with dyslexia. For example, Afnan found it difficult to catch up with the class and she was not always able to complete her writing in class sessions. She reported: “I like writing, yes, but most of the time I can’t finish [on time]. The teacher then asks me to complete it at home as homework.” (Z-I-Afnan Interview)

Model school

At a parental level, the perceived link between dyslexia and reading was also expressed, as Ali’s mother blamed ‘dyslexia’ for limiting her child’s ability: “Yes, this is what happened to him, he was not able to read or write because of dyslexia” (S-M- Ali’s Mother’s Interview). Yasser’s mother also connected dyslexia with general academic achievement, which including reading and writing: “He can’t read and he

can't write, and as a result he lacks understanding in all educational subjects" (S-M-Yasser's Mother Interview).

Reversing words and confusion

Sometimes, participants were very specific about the nature of the reading and/or writing difficulties, in particular when commenting on reversal and confusion.

Inclusive schools

One school headteacher understood dyslexia as being related to the reversal of words when reading. "It is when you read words in reverse," she said. (M-I-HT Interview)

Some of the interviewees referred to the reversal of letters, as well as the confusion between these letters. "All I know about dyslexia is that the student is incapable of reading, and perhaps he even sees the words in reverse. He might also confuse letters such as "b" and "d", or even write things upside down." (Kh-I-ET Interview). Similarly, another English teacher supported this with a similar view by stating: "It is a difficulty faced by some students whereby we can see that the student will confuse letters or repeat them unnecessarily" (Q-I-ET Interview).

Other teachers focused on the early beginning of the writing stage by stating:

It starts with the students writing their names the wrong way around by starting with the last letter of their name and ending with the first, as though you are looking at the text through a mirror (Kh-I-ET Interview).

Within the inclusive schools, some teachers held the view that dyslexia became apparent through issues with letter order, be it in reading or writing. These letter order problems could involve reversal, repetition or confusion. The aforementioned

quotes are from the school principal or English teachers, and do not include specific reference to difficulties with Arabic letters.

In referring to the difficulties that a student with dyslexia might face, a mother placed emphasis on students' confusion and mixing up of letters: "they have a problem which makes them mix up the letters. My daughter used to tell me, 'Mother do not be upset, I don't know why I forget these letters.'" (Z-I-Afnan's Mother's Interview)

Model schools

Some teachers talk about the reversal of letters, as well as the confusion between them. One Arabic teacher made a reference to cultural or linguistic issues as she stated: "Confusing "ض" and "ط", or "ق" and "غ" is due to the impact of the Kuwaiti accent and environment. (JK-M-AT interview)

When contrasting the beliefs surrounding literacy and dyslexia at inclusive and Model schools, interesting similarities and differences were identified. Crucially, teachers, staff, psychologists and even students at both types of schools were of the view that dyslexia involved an inability to read and write. The principals at both school types, however, discussed the variance in cases and manifestations of dyslexia. While the rest of the participants' remarks may simply be a poor choice of phrasing, or perhaps misinformation, it does highlight the fact that current dyslexia provision is insufficient and hence the belief that these children 'cannot read' may accurately reflect the current situation. At the same time, the principals at both schools having improved awareness demonstrates that these awareness advancements at the leadership level are not being passed down to staff. This in turn prevents practice based on sound information from being implemented.

Similarly, difficulties in writing were blamed on dyslexia at both schools, by staff and parents alike. The issue of reversal or mixing of letters was commonly mentioned, and was identified as a problem in both English and Arabic. Model school staff did demonstrate improved awareness of the difficulties presented by the linguistic context being the variation in accent form, as well as the standard formal register and the opposite writing direction of Arabic compared to English. An awareness of contextual factors at the Model school demonstrates that these teachers are better equipped to tackle and mitigate issues, rather than blaming difficulties as something inherent and unsolvable in dyslexia. This represents a crucial starting point to any well-informed dyslexia provision.

Number of difficulties

While the general term 'learning difficulties' involved dyslexia, several participants chose to use 'learning difficulty' as an umbrella term, which encompassed numerous and diverse difficulties. Teachers often relied on the Arabic term for dyslexia (reading difficulty) so that even when describing multiple issues, their comments still revolved around the central issue of reading. This is not the same as the recognition that manifestations of dyslexia vary from case to case; it is merely an identification of some of the difficulties experienced by dyslexic children in general. Teachers at both model and inclusive schools were aware that dyslexia was linked to several issues, yet their answers tended to be based upon reading ability, and to a lesser extent writing. These ideas became clear from policy documents, as well as the teachers' interview data collected at both inclusive and Model schools.

Inclusive schools

In an inclusive school an Arabic teacher tied these difficulties to the child's ability to read and write: "A child who has a number of difficulties; most of them are related to his ability to read" (Z-I-AT interview). One of the teachers assumed that "dyslexia is a variety of different learning difficulties" (MD-I-ET interview).

The inclusive school's headteacher shared the same view made by his / her counterpart at the Model school regarding the uniqueness of each student's difficulties, stating that "dyslexia is a variety of different learning difficulties that a student suffers from and varies from student to student." (MD-I-HT interview). This was an encouraging sign of awareness, at least at the leadership level.

Model schools

While Model schools specialised in 'learning difficulties', these were not limited to dyslexia. The policy of the Model schools connected 'learning difficulties'-- which included dyslexia -- with a number of challenges: "This causes problems in the individual's ability to speak, read, write, spell, draw conclusions or calculate, as well as negatively impacting other factors such as concentration, memory, social skills, and interactive development." (Model school policy)

In addition, the policy perceives learning difficulties as related to other disabilities. In describing this, the policy document claims that learning difficulties often coincided with other issues. The document states that learning difficulties exist 'alongside' other disabilities, thus linking between the two and asserting that learning difficulties can cause or be caused by a number of issues. The following extract illustrates this viewpoint:

Although learning difficulties may exist alongside problems of self-control, awareness, and social interaction, these problems do not cause or create learning difficulties. Learning difficulties may also exist alongside other disabilities such as sensory deficiencies or impaired / delayed mental development, in addition to different external factors such as cultural differences or insufficient education” (Model school policy).

Participants

This connection between learning difficulties/dyslexia and other difficulties was also noted by some of the teachers in Model schools. An English teacher, for example, defined dyslexia using almost the same words presented in the school policy: “Difficulties in reading will create other difficulties” (S-M-ET interview). This demonstrates a belief that dyslexia appears to be connected with a wider range of issues. While it was expected that teachers would have a greater depth of knowledge regarding the effects of dyslexia on writing, the psychologists did appear to have knowledge on the subject due to their own experience. One of them expressed her own views on the difficulties that may accompany dyslexia. An additional aspect to vision problems mentioned by the teacher was also raised, the problem being one of hearing. The complete quote is as follows:

He can't write with good style and he has no control over this. He doesn't understand why this is happening to him. Some students try hard to read but they can't. In addition, if the teacher asks him to write from right to left, he may write from left to right.

Memory issues

According to the study participants, poor memory and difficulties with following directions were also some of the characteristics of children with dyslexia.

Interviewees often expressed that poor memory was always accompanied by other difficulties and problems.

Inclusive schools

An English teacher included memory in some of the difficulties which correspond to dyslexia, in addition to features regarding memory, saying: “Her dyslexia involves difficulty in reading and writing, but also a weak memory_and unclear handwriting, which can’t be read.” (Z-I-ET Interview).

Model school

One Arabic teacher mentioned a poor memory of the child with dyslexia, by saying: “a child who has a poor memory, even if she studied well, she will definitely forget most of it the next day” (JK-M-AT Interview). Ali’s mother emphasised that the reason for the child’s difficulty was poor memory: “My son has reading and writing difficulties; even when copying words, he reverses them. He also has a bad memory.” (S-M-Ali’s Mother’s Interview). In the interview, another parent indicated that her son has been diagnosed by the CCET centre where she was informed that the child’s memory was not an issue: “He said that it’s not a big deal that he’s got difficulty in talking – he’d sometimes remember things but sometimes forget. Again, this happens quite often.” (S-M-Yasser’s Mother Interview). She also pointed out that this is one of the major characteristics of a child with dyslexia, including her son Yasser, “who is also forgetful. When the teacher asks what something is, or if she asks him something, he forgets the question.” (S-M-Yasser’s Mother’s Interview)

Sensory Issues

Inclusive schools

Participants at both model and inclusive schools highlighted sensory issues, particularly those related to disruptions or distortions in vision. The notion that dyslexic children suffer from deceptive vision appeared to be commonly held in Kuwait. This points to a lack of understanding of the condition.

The reversal of words was mentioned, once again, by an English teacher but in the context of vision disruption: “Perhaps he even sees the words in reverse” (Kh-I-ET interview). Sight was another factor that was mentioned, in particular by one parent, when she spoke in regards to the difficulties her daughter with dyslexia faces. She recounted the words of her daughter by stating: “Afnan tells me ‘sometimes my sight doesn’t help me to see the words’” (Z-I- Afnan’s Mother Interview).

Model schools

Moving lines or words was one aspect described amongst the study participants: “Some of the words may appear missing during his reading; he might see the lines close to each other, or could see moving words or the words written back-to-front.” (S-M-AT interview). Another teacher explained that “the child cannot see the words clearly; they may see them dancing or moving like waves or in a vortex.” (S-M-ET interview)

A school headteacher shared their views: “Their difficulties are with reading what they see; sometimes, the lines are doubled, the sentences repeated or the letters appear to move.” (S-M-HT interview). One Model school psychologist further

mentioned a matter connected to hearing: “In some cases the teacher pronounces the letter “N”, but he hears M” (S-M-Psychologist interview)

A few participants appeared to be aware of the characteristics of dyslexia. There appeared to be a link between the term dyslexia and the child seeing ‘dancing letters’ for some teachers. A few participants, however, pointed characteristics of dyslexia which they believed were associated with sensory issues.

According to the interview data, the school staff had differing perspectives and understandings of dyslexia. One of the issues to draw attention to is the uncertainty among the school staff regarding the characteristics of dyslexia. This idea will be discussed in detail in chapter five section 5.4.3.

Another important issue is how the child with dyslexia sees words or hears sounds. Participant perceptions surrounding the nature of dyslexia were an interesting indicator of the overall level of knowledge in Kuwait, and the differences between that can be seen in both model and inclusive schools. This cannot be attributed to policy or lack thereof, as while the Model school did have documentation and the inclusive didn’t, teachers at both schools were unaware of any policy related to SEN, inclusion or learning difficulties.

Dyslexia was seen as a learning difficulty in both model and inclusive schools, which also reflects a wider adoption of the term throughout the country. The term ‘learning difficulties’ itself presented a challenge to some teachers, who explained that differentiating between ‘learning difficulties’ and some other types of SEN was difficult. They also compared learning difficulties with other types of SEN, particularly when the child’s needs related to literacy skills. They did, however, use the term

'learning difficulties', to refer to students with dyslexia as opposed to 'slow learners' or children with Down's syndrome or autism. This term was used heavily by Model school teachers, as it is used extensively in reports and statements in the two Model schools. When examining the policy of the two Model schools, however, they appeared to be identical in content. Another reason behind the use of the term learning difficulty could be attributed to the fact that the staff had undergone training within the Model school initiative, and thus was influenced by that context.

As for the manifestation of dyslexia, staff and parents tended to focus on an impeded ability to read, with writing occasionally being linked to this. Some staff and parents held the view that dyslexic children were entirely incapable of reading. There was a more nuanced view expressed by school principals, who did state that reading abilities varied on a case by case basis.

Teachers discussed the issue of letter reversal and the confusion between them. One Model school teacher pointed out the unique difficulties presented by Arabic letters and their occasionally proximate pronunciations to one another. The issue of differences in pronunciation between local dialect and the formal register taught in schools may play a role in this. The Arabic script is likely to be a factor too, as letters can often look very similar, and this often depends on the placement of a dot, despite having completely different sounds.

Sensory issues were also discussed, with teachers at both model and inclusive schools mentioning 'moving lines' and 'dancing letters'. This demonstrates the lack of scientific understanding surrounding the condition in Kuwait. The idea that dyslexia is an intrinsic difficulty that may distort vision, or as mentioned earlier,

present the child from learning to read could be attributed to the prevalence of the medical model in the discourse surrounding dyslexia in Kuwait.

4.2.2 Medical model

In this study, the understandings of dyslexia in Kuwaiti primary schools seemed to be based on a medical model of disability. Model school participants and policies portrayed dyslexia as an inherent internal problem of the child. Dyslexia was seen as being directly caused by disease, illness or other health conditions. It was thus seen to require treatment by professionals who needed to pursue a medical explanation in order to cure and resolve the individual's difficulties.

Internal

Model schools depicted dyslexia as a problem within the child. This was done both policy and some participants. No mention was made from any of the inclusive schools participants regarding this aspect. As such, this seems to be linked with the training staff received at the Model schools, as well as the school policy.

Model schools

The policy provided an important source of understanding for the concept of dyslexia within the Kuwaiti context. The school policy portrayed 'learning difficulties', in their words, as "personal disorders":

Learning difficulties are a group of varied, heterogeneous developmental disorders that some individuals have. These personal disorders (within the individual) are the result of a defect in the central nervous system which negatively impacts their ability to receive, deal with and express [information] (Model school Policy)

This demonstrates that policymaking circles have adopted the medical approach to dyslexia.

Some of the study's participants' views originated from the medical model, where dyslexia is likely to be understood as a deficiency. When asked about the characteristics of children with dyslexia, a school psychologist explained: "The problem is mentally internal, he is suffering from this on his own and no one knows about his case." (S-M- Psychologist Interview).

Illness

Inclusive schools

For some of the staff, dyslexia was defined as an 'illness'. An inclusive school deputy headteacher described dyslexia in the following way: "It is an illness that entails difficulty in reading and its symptoms are quite apparent." (Q-I-DH- interview). Similarly, an Arabic teacher stated: "There are some children that have this illness" (MD-I-AT interview).

The deputy headteacher and Arabic teacher at the inclusive schools were the only participants to label the condition as an 'illness'. It is possible that other interviewees had this word in mind, but were cautious with their semantics while discussing the matters with a researcher. There is also the possibility that they genuinely didn't perceive dyslexia as an illness.

Treatability

Some participants thought that dyslexia was a condition that could be 'overcome' or even prevented through the right kind of support. This rationale could be associated with a quotation in the Holy Quran that declares, "Verily, with every difficulty there is relief" (Surah Al Inshirah, 6).

Model schools

The Model schools' policy and objectives stress that learning difficulties can be overcome, stating the following as a goal:

To include students with learning difficulties in the educational district once more after a sufficient period of time in which they can overcome their hardship, as well as having others continue their studies in a manner that suits the level of difficulty they face. (Model schools Policy)

Moreover, in other clauses in the policy document, the importance of early treatment of 'learning difficulties' is highlighted to 'overcome the condition': "The availability of suitable, early treatment provides the affected individuals with a greater personal ability and motivation to overcome their learning difficulties and to strive for work and success." (Model schools Policy)

As with other sections of this study, teachers did not cite any policy in their responses. It is interesting to note that Model school interviewees were the ones who believed that dyslexia could be overcome. That might relate to what had been stated in the school policy, as stated earlier. An Arabic teacher had views consistent with the policy and described dyslexia by stating: "however, if we try to overcome these problems using approved special methods, then this child will be able to get rid of this difficulty." (S-M-AT Interview) For some members of staff, inclusion was associated with their beliefs in regards to improving the skills of dyslexic children and the idea that dyslexia can be overcome. Accordingly, they suggested excluding students with dyslexia/learning difficulties for a 'limited time'. As an Arabic teacher stated:

These [dyslexic] students require additional treatment through the use of centres or in other ways I do not know about. For them to complete their state education,

they need treatment. Perhaps that student can, for a limited time, go to a specialist school like the S Model school and then return to her original school if treatment is available. This is for students with extreme learning difficulties (MD-I-AT Interview).

A school psychologist therefore suggested that it is the government and the media's responsibility to raise awareness of dyslexia in the society: "Support can be provided by the media and government to let people know about dyslexia and accept the concept, also to let each person know about it, not seeing it as something difficult to treat." (S-M-Psychologist Interview)

This view was reflected in the parents' understanding as well. For example, Ali's mother viewed her dyslexic child as: "not disabled, he only has a problem which can be treated" (S-M-Ali's Mother's Interview)

In summary, it appeared that perceptions were largely based off the medical model. Two staff members at the inclusive school described dyslexia as an 'illness', demonstrating a concerning lack of awareness. The lack of policy at the inclusive schools aggravates this lack of awareness, yet while policy exists in the Model schools which discusses how dyslexia can be 'overcome', participants did not directly cite policy at any stage. There appears to be consistency between the policy and participants' views in this case, although policy was not directly referred to in the responses. The fact that Model school staff know of the possibility of treating and mitigating dyslexia represents crucial progress in awareness and the path to better practice. This was not, however, reflected at the inclusive school, where staff did not mention the issue of treatment. Chapter five will discuss overcoming dyslexia in more details in section 5.4.5.

Findings

4.2.3 Normality

Dyslexia has no obvious external symptoms like some other disabilities, and as such, people may misinterpret the dyslexic person's behaviour. Due to this, some staff emphasised the normality of the dyslexic student in terms of his or her appearance. Dyslexia was also perceived by inclusive school teachers and parents in terms of 'what it is not'.

Normal

While the concept of 'normal' is, of course, subjective, it was discussed by participants in relation to dyslexia. Participants at both schools generally expressed that dyslexic children were 'normal', which they seemed to believe had to be pointed out. Used in this context, the word normal is problematic, and presents an issue with the discourse surrounding the condition, as well as a lack of sensitivity. The issue of using correct language to describe dyslexia has not even been approached in Kuwait. This is more likely to be addressed when basic policy concerning awareness and practice is implemented.

Inclusive schools

The majority of the participants agreed that a child with dyslexia is 'normal', in terms of the child's appearance, and without specifying what the child's characteristics are. This view was highlighted by a schoolteacher who described a child with dyslexia by saying: "Externally, the child looks completely normal in appearance, and does not have any distinguishing characteristics. "(Kh-I-ET Interview) There were a variety of additional factors, however, as some staff thought it might be depression. The

English teacher discussed this as follows: “In terms of appearance, he is just a normal pupil, but he is depressed.” (Z-I-ET Interview)

A headteacher did not go into detail about the characteristics of students with dyslexia but summarised by saying: “The child is normal but has problems with reading. In another words he or she is dyslexic.” (MD-I-HT-Interview)

It was important to understand the child with dyslexia understands what it means to be dyslexic, and this affects whether they view themselves as ‘normal’ or as ‘good’, Afnan expressed that: “I am good but I have dyslexia” (Z-I-Interview.)

Model schools

The school psychologist expressed her awareness that the child with dyslexia is ‘normal’ in appearance and that dyslexia had no external symptoms. She said: “he is a normal clever child; there aren’t any external symptoms or anything that shows in his personality. These children are normal and not different to their classmates” (S-M- Psychologist Interview).

Most of the inclusive school teachers emphasised that the child with dyslexia is normal. Model school staff were less concerned with labelling the condition as ‘normal’ or not. The issue of normality will be discussed in the following chapter section 5.4.4.

What dyslexia is not

Many participants chose to identify dyslexia by pointing out characteristics which they believed were not associated with it. The notion that dyslexia is not a disability was mentioned several times, particularly by parents, demonstrating their keenness to dispel some of the myths surrounding the condition, especially in Kuwait.

| | Participants | Quotes |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Not a disability | Inclusive-S- Parent/ Afnan | They describe it as disability, but I say, it is not like this |
| | Model-S- Parent/Yasser | Dyslexia is not a disability |
| | Inclusive-S- Parent/ Afnan | As a parent, I say that dyslexia is not a disability. My eldest son has Down syndrome, so I know the difference between a disability and dyslexia and those with SEN. |
| | Model-S- Parent/ Ali | s/he is not disabled, s/he only has a problem, which can be treated |

Table 7: *Dyslexia is not a disability*

As seen in Table 7, parents at both the Model and inclusive schools consistently repeated the belief that dyslexia is not a disability. This emphasis was on dyslexia not being a disability and/or their children not being 'stupid / lazy'. The parents are also more likely to want to believe that their child is different and not 'ill' or 'slow'. Afnan's mother stressed that dyslexia is not a disability: "They describe it as disability, but I say, it is not like this" (Z-I-Afnan's mother Interview). She clarified her experience by saying: "As a parent, I say that dyslexia is not a disability. My eldest son has Down's Syndrome, so I know the difference between disability and dyslexia and those with SEN."

Not ‘stupid, lazy or thick’

Inclusive schools

One Arabic teacher stated: “Children are not lazy, stupid or thick, but they have difficulty in acquiring information” (MD-I-AT Interview). In spite of the effort made to support students with difficulties, an English teacher admitted that there was a lack of understanding as to what a specific learning difficulty is, by saying: “Thinking back, I would notice some students were not lazy but they had problems, and this is something that is saddening indeed.” (Q-I-ET interview)

Model schools

A mother of a child from a Model school denied that her child was a trouble maker by saying the following: “My judgment is that my son has learning difficulties, and not that he is a trouble maker or lazy.” (S-M-Ali’s Mother).

In the previous section, the focus has been on participants’ understanding of dyslexia. Looking at the responses of the participants of this study, children believed that dyslexia is a problem which they themselves must confront. They also believed that they needed support from their school and their teacher. Parents of children with dyslexia do not see it as a disability. Teachers focused on the normality of the child and connected dyslexia with the child’s ability to read and achievements. Finally, ‘specialists’ seem to connect dyslexia with intelligence and biological aspects.

4.2.4 Section summary

The findings of the current study revealed that staff in both types of schools had differing perspectives and understandings of dyslexia. One issue to be highlighted is the uncertainty among the school staff regarding the characteristics of dyslexia.

The study teachers and staff interpreted it in terms of its impact on academic progress and achievements. In this regard, dyslexia was seen as a difficulty in reading, or in some instances, in writing. Some participants thought that dyslexia was a condition that may be 'overcome' or even prevented through the right kind of support. This rationale signifies that dyslexia is seen as a reading difficulty in the Arabic language. This, in turn, strengthens the notion of the need for a cure, as well as the idea that the individual's difficulty in reading might be due to a personal lack of a commitment to reading. Some children with dyslexia believe that dyslexia is their own problem but they do still need support from the school and or their teachers. In contrast, the parents of these children emphasized that dyslexia is not a difficulty and highlighted the normality of their child. They perceived dyslexia as a difference in mental functioning. Understanding dyslexia will be discussed further along in chapter five.

The following table presents a comparison between inclusive and Model schools in regards to the first theme, which is 'understanding dyslexia'

| Theme/ subtheme | Inclusive schools | Model schools |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Understanding Dyslexia | RQ1: How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait? | |
| Nature of difficulty | Dyslexia was seen as a learning difficulty in both model and inclusive schools. The tern LD is used in Model schools policy documents and children statements and thus in mainstream usage within that context. Dyslexia was perceived as a number of difficulties and was linked to the child's ability to read and write. For some, it was associated with some sensory issues. | |
| Medical Model | Illness The deputy Headteacher and Arabic teacher at the inclusive schools were the only participants to label the condition as an 'illness'. | Internal policy: personal disorder. Treatable policy: participant students can overcome their difficulty. |
| Normality | A child with dyslexia is 'normal' in terms of appearance. | Staff is less concerned with labelling the condition as 'normal' or not. |
| | Parents stressed that dyslexia is not a disability and put on their children not being 'stupid / lazy' in n both schools | |

Table 8: Understanding dyslexia in inclusive and Model schools

4.3 Understanding the practice: How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included? (Related to RQ2)

After discussing the perceptions of the condition of dyslexia itself, it is important to look at how these manifest into practice. The second research question will be answered by comprehensively presenting each type of school, starting with the inclusive schools and then the Model schools, to gain a complete and clarified understanding of practice. Subsequently, the inclusive and Model schools will be compared and contrasted.

| Theme | Subtheme | Second level Codes |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Understanding the practice in the Inclusive Schools | Identification | Key in the process of Identification Barriers to identification |
| | Supporting children with dyslexia | Inside the class room The curriculum Intervention planning Lesson planning |
| | Inclusion of children with dyslexia | Purpose of inclusive education understanding of inclusion |
| Understanding the practice in the Model schools | Identification | Identification is not applicable Barriers to identification |
| | Supporting children with dyslexia | Inside the class room The curriculum Intervention planning One to one classes Lesson planning |
| | Inclusion of children with dyslexia | Purpose of Inclusive Education Understanding of inclusion |

Table 9: The 2nd theme: Supporting children with dyslexia

4.3.1 Understanding practice in inclusive schools

The findings will be presented from the data collected at inclusive schools. This will be followed by an analysis of the child. The aim is to better understand the practice, from the perspective of both the children with dyslexia and their parents. The focus of the current study is to explore the understanding of dyslexia conceptually and practically, therefore, the selection of the child's case was one of the most representative of practice. Gaining insight into the practice of inclusive schools will assist in presenting suggestions for the overall improvement of provisions for dyslexic children, be it through enhancing inclusive provisions or arguing for a greater priority to be placed on improving Model schools.

Identification

The process of identification starts when a child is struggling generally in mainstream education and is referred to the school psychologist to undergo an IQ test. If the child's IQ score in this test is 85 or above, he or she will be qualified for a transfer to one of the Model schools. The diagnostic process, however, will be continued by the CCET centre, which will then decide whether or not the student has specific learning difficulties.

Based on interview data, school staff seemed surprisingly unaware of any coherent theoretical guidelines, or what those may look like. As usual, awareness of policy and protocol was better at the leadership level, with a headteacher listing the steps that needed to be taken in order to attain suitable and correct identification. She detailed:

Firstly, the Arabic and English language teachers tell me [about a case], and then I tell the psychologist. The psychologist then gives the teacher a form to fill in with some details about the student. Following this, the psychologist then conducts some intelligence (IQ) tests in order to specify what kind of problem we are facing, whether it is a learning difficulty or just slowness (MD-I-HT interview).

Before this step, a general test is usually carried out to measure the level of achievement, at the beginning of the academic year as a headteacher addressed:

Firstly, there is a general screening examination for all students between years 2 and 5. Secondly, the teachers specify which children are weak and follow up on their condition in class. If the student suffers from lower achievement in several subjects, I refer them to the psychologist. Thirdly, the psychologist will count the number of difficulties that have become apparent and conduct tests. Following this, the psychologist will meet with the teacher and give her guidance and advice on setting a teaching plan. We also summon the parent of the child, because their cooperation in these instances is important (MD-I-HT Interview).

These tests also help to identify if the child has any weakness or difficulty.

Key players in the process of identification

Teachers

When asking the teachers in inclusive schools about their ability to identify dyslexia, they all appeared to believe that they were capable of this. One of the interviewees believed that teaching experience was more valuable than the knowledge of some researchers:

From my point of view, the class teacher knows much better than the researcher who comes to give us seminars. With our experience, from the start of the first lesson, I can identify which children in the class have a problem and which are excellent students. (Z-I- ET interview)

She highlighted another issue in this regard:

Yes, I can determine and identify those students who have difficulties, including dyslexic children, due to my teaching skills and my continuous engagement with them. Even if I can't assess the problem they are suffering from, I can at least say that there is something wrong with this or that student. (Z-i- ET interview)

An English teacher believed that her experience teaching was the source of her ability to identify learning difficulty cases: "Yes, I can, and I can do this by listening to the student's answers, looking at the student's writing, and also referring to my experience with the students." (MD-I-ET interview)

Some teachers were confused by the distinction between children with dyslexia and other types of SEN, such as slow learning, due to the similarity of their symptoms.

One explained this as such:

Occasionally, I am unable to tell the difference. This is because it is difficult to distinguish between slow learners and those with learning difficulties since their symptoms are similar, and therefore dyslexia can only be diagnosed through psychological examinations (Q-I- ET interview).

Another teacher expressed a similar view:

I still cannot identify the type of problem [that the child is suffering from] with 100% certainty, or if it is related to problems at home, or perhaps a different kind of problem such as just being a slow learner. This is because these problems have similar symptoms (Kh-I-ET interview).

Meanwhile, the Arabic teacher could not distinguish between learning difficulties and general weaknesses. He explained: “Yes, I am able to identify struggling students but I cannot determine whether they are suffering from learning difficulties or just a weakness in the subject. I am able to do this through dealing with them and through my experience” (MD-I-AT interview).

Specialists

Some teachers did realise that while they may be able to identify a student with dyslexia, formal standardised testing was needed to constitute an official diagnosis. They assumed that the appropriate diagnosis should be performed by the school psychologist: “I could notice the deficiency in reading or writing, but the psychologist diagnoses the case, since there are special tests for this purpose. Over time, I could discover the problem myself” (Z-I-AT interview).

Afnan’s mother stated that several tests were needed before obtaining a statement of dyslexia for her daughter:

When the psychologist saw her writing and how she mixed up letters, she said to me ‘my initial impression is that your daughter may suffer from dyslexia, but I can’t pass firm judgment yet without carrying out several tests on her. She did so, and decided that my daughter suffers from dyslexia (Z-I-Afnan’s Mother).

Regardless of the effectiveness of these assessment procedures, the school staff indicated that the majority of the parents refused to let their child undergo assessment as they see this process as labelling the child as disabled. An English

teacher pointed this out by saying: “The problem is that some parents might object to the idea that their child suffers from learning difficulties, because they assume that you are suggesting that their child is disabled” (MD-I-ET Interview)

Parents

Only two of the children that participated in the current study in the inclusive schools were diagnosed by the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA) as having dyslexia, with the parents of the children requesting this diagnosis. I was able to interview only one parent of the two children who pointed to an absence of a role played by her daughter’s school in identifying the difficulty: “I provided the school with the information given to me by the KDA.”. She added that she informed the school about Afnan’s diagnosis: “During the Parents Assembly, I used to tell them that my daughter suffers from dyslexia.” (Z-I-Afnan’s Mother’s Interview).

The staff, however, questioned the validity of the diagnostic process and claimed that the student had no problems/difficulties. Both the diagnosed students’ Arabic and English teachers doubted the rationale of the diagnosis and asserted that Afnan was an above average student and definitely not dyslexic. This indicates a general misunderstanding among staff that dyslexia is directly linked to low intelligence or performance. Through my own observation I noticed that Afnan was struggling while reading and was not participating unless she was asked to. The Arabic teacher cited the reason for this as being:

Because she has been absent for three days, so the lesson is new to her and old for the other students. I have mentioned to you that Afnan is not suffering from learning difficulties or dyslexia and she has no problems despite the fact that she was diagnosed by the KDA. She does not need any special attention (Z-I-AT-Interview).

Likewise, the English teacher supported this opinion: “Afnan has been diagnosed as dyslexic this year by the KDA. I do not see her suffering from any problems and her grades in the English language are acceptable” (Z-I-ET-Interview).

Barriers to identification

The teachers were asked what their subsequent steps would be after diagnosis, in other words, after the child had been identified as having a ‘learning difficulty’ or dyslexia. Some teachers considered this the end point of their role and, furthermore, they considered that the responsibility was then transferred to the Model schools specialising in learning difficulties. A school headteacher mentioned that:

We inform the parents about their son or daughter’s status, and that he has to transfer the child to a school for those with LDs. The process of moving the child to the new school has to be done with the consent of the parents. If the parents give that consent then we will make the arrangements between us and the other school (Z-I- HT Interview)

While some teachers did admit that a lack of proper training is the reason behind not being able to identify dyslexia, others seemed to think that their expertise was sufficient. All the inclusive school’s staff involved in this study reported that they did not have the time to monitor and assess their pupils due to the large number of students within the classroom. The lack of awareness regarding the nature of the difficulty forms a barrier to achieving the academic targets behind the identification.

This is stressed by an English teacher as follows:

They will not fully achieve their objectives if the parents of the child with learning difficulties believe that his or her presence in one of these schools makes him or her ‘disabled’. Also, there will be no benefits or achievements if the teacher does not understand how to deal with such students. As such, I hope that there will be more awareness raised within the Ministry [of Education] and other institutions (Z-I-ET interview).

Raising society's awareness of dyslexia and other types of SEN was, hence, a parental duty, as Afnan's mother stated: "I hope for awareness and knowledge for all about dyslexia. I get frustrated as no one understood me when I talked about my daughter's dyslexia" (Z-I- Afnan's mother interview).

One of the interviewees stated that raising awareness will need a certain period of time:

We need a time period of about five years in order to educate Kuwaiti schools and parents about what learning difficulties are and how we can diagnose these conditions, whilst also preparing teachers for dealing with these students so that we can be fully prepared (Q-I-DH Interview).

This was endorsed by another teacher, who said: "The barriers that would prevent this from happening are found in the absence of understanding these types [of students], whether this misunderstanding occurs at home, from the teachers or society as a whole." (Kh-I-ET-Interview)

There were various opinions about who was responsible for raising society's awareness. The deputy headteacher, for instance, thought that it was the psychologist's role:

I believe that the office for psychological services should have a larger role in making parents aware of these problems. This is so that parents do not become upset if they hear that their child is suffering from reading difficulties, and so that they do not think that their child is disabled. (Q-I-DH Interview)

She also added that the media plays an important role in this regard:

Also, we need television channels to spend time, even a little, to raise awareness, and they should regard it as a public service without necessarily expecting material reward. Why does the Dyslexia Association not conduct media campaigns? The media plays no role. There is a film called 'Bio Film' that discusses disabilities and 'Keys' that discusses talents. These were produced by youths, and we need more like this. (Q-I-DH Interview)

The process of identification was described as beginning when a child was observed to struggle, at which point they would undergo IQ testing. Teaching staff had limited knowledge of this process and generally saw their involvement as minimal. A challenge is evident in teachers' confusion between dyslexia and other types of learning difficulties. At the same time, teachers seemed confident of their ability to identify cases for referral to psychologists. They highlighted parental objection as an obstacle to assessment, due to stigma. Paradoxically, they seemed to refuse to accept the authority and legitimacy of the specialised KDA in matters of diagnosis for two students and they appeared to feel that they were better equipped to do this themselves. Teachers also often believed that the child had no learning difficulties due to achieving well. This represents a limited understanding, one which is drawn solely from academic attainment, perhaps delaying early identification. Teachers describe time constraints as an obstacle to their further involvement in the assessment process due to large class sizes.

Headteachers were more aware of the processes that lead to and follow on from the IQ tests, explaining general achievement tests would flag unusual weaknesses. A diverse range of participants, be they teachers, psychologists, headteachers or parents, all identified a lack of awareness as a key obstacle. Model school teachers are not tasked with identification, as all the students that enter the school have already been diagnosed with a learning difficulty. The process of identification and its challenges will be discussed in chapter five.

4.3.2 Supporting children with dyslexia

This section focuses on school practice and presents the support provided for children with 'learning difficulties'/dyslexia through classroom practice.

Under this theme, the participants' views on the support provided to students with dyslexia/learning difficulties will be explored. The data was documented through interviewing Arabic and English teachers in each classroom, as well as interviewing the headteachers, school psychologists, dyslexic children and their parents. Observation was conducted in order to better understand classroom practice and the interaction between dyslexic students and their teachers. Another goal was to gain insights into the quality of learning and support these students receive. In observing this, the classroom environment, seating arrangements and the materials and resources were all taken into account. Furthermore, the experiences of dyslexic students and their parents within Kuwait's educational system were explored to consolidate and contextualise the challenges that have been overcome or those that still persist.

Inside the classroom (observation)

In Kuwait, teachers are given the freedom to conduct lessons in classroom or any area or learning environment that they see as enhancing the learning process of the students, for example in the subject or activity club. I observed eight lessons in inclusive schools, of these seven were conducted in the classroom, with teachers choosing the location of the lesson based on the nature of the lesson. If extra equipment/materials were required, then the class would be taken to the activity club for the relevant subject.

Inclusive school classrooms had a traditional seating arrangement with desks in rows facing forwards, with plain walls and traditional white boards but no computers or any other electronic equipment. That was the same in all classrooms observed. The classroom was arranged so that the teacher was always in the centre front next to the whiteboard, faced by the students sitting at individual tables. These tables could be joined together by only slightly manoeuvring between the rows, which was done by the teachers. Children did not have a designated personal space in the classroom except for a drawer attached to their desk.

Classroom environment in Kuwait (observation)

One purpose of the observation was to study the background to the lessons, in order to understand the interaction between students with dyslexia and their teachers, as well as the quality of the learning process. Their class environment included the arrangements for seating, materials and resources; I explored the similarities and differences of the learning spaces in the model and the inclusive schools.

In Kuwait, teachers can conduct lessons either in classrooms or the activity club, where they practice the skill or what they learned in the class with the availability of extra materials. I observed 12 lessons, 11 of which were conducted in the classroom. What guided the choice was the nature of the lesson. If extra equipment and materials were necessary, they usually preferred the club where everything was. The figure below shows the layout of the classroom in both Model and inclusive Kuwaiti schools. Both layouts reveal the teacher-centred teaching culture. Inclusive school classrooms had a traditional seating arrangement with desks in rows facing

forwards, while in the Model school the layout facilitates peer collaboration and group work. The walls were dull in colour with a few old, worn posters.

I found no difference between the classrooms regarding the availability of resources, except the screen and video equipment, which I saw used only in the Model schools. Below, the layout of the classroom in both model and inclusive Kuwaiti schools is illustrated:

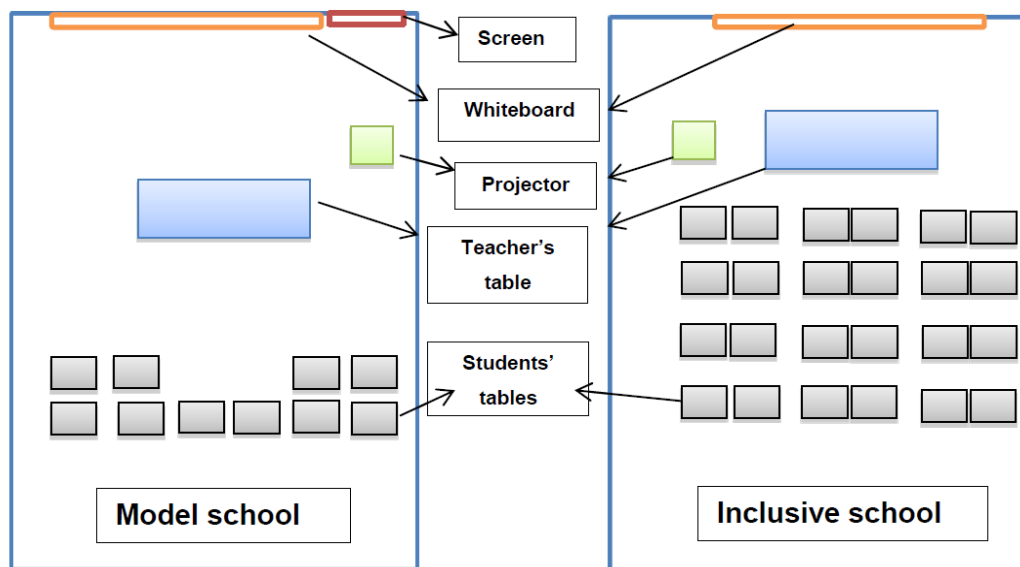


Figure 3: Layout of the classroom in Model and inclusive Kuwaiti schools

The curriculum

The curriculum offered in Kuwaiti primary mainstream school is limited to a series of books for all the subjects; these books are published by the Ministry of Education and associated with the centralised education system. These books follow the framework presented by the subject supervisors, who decide on the topic order, number of lessons for each topic and delivery timeframe. This applies for both inclusive and Model schools. Teachers rely on these books to determine what topics and skills are to be taught, as they are the only source of curriculum materials. Some

interviewed teachers agreed that the curriculum was inappropriate for children with dyslexia, as stated by an English teacher: “How can a student who suffers from Dyslexia deal with a year three curriculum? Just for one class period, there are fifteen new words. How can a dyslexic child learn to read and write 15 new words in one class? It can’t be” (Z-I-ET interview).

The teacher pinpointed that the priority has always been on the quantity of information a student can rote learn, not on the quality and depth of learning.

Intervention planning

To meet the individual needs of students with learning difficulties, inclusive schools conduct a test at the beginning of each academic year. This is carried out to measure the level of achievement, as well as to identify any signs of learning difficulties in children. This is addressed by the headteacher as follows:

Firstly, there is a general screening examination for all students between years 2 and 5. Secondly, the teachers specify which children are weak and follow up on their condition in class. If the student suffers from lower achievement in several subjects, I refer them to the psychologist. Thirdly, the psychologist will count the number of difficulties that have become apparent and conduct tests. Following this, the psychologist will meet with the teacher and give her guidance and advice on setting a teaching plan. We also summon the parent of the child, because their cooperation in these instances is important. (MD-I-HT Interview)

These tests are applied to identify if the child has any difficulty or weakness at all.

The intervention plan mentioned for supporting students with learning difficulties was, however, rather vague:

We don’t apply individual plans for children. There is a general plan prepared by the department, and approved by the supervisor. I apply this according to the needs of the student. [...] We do not involve the student in the creation of the Intervention plans. There will be targets set for them to follow by the teacher but we don’t inform the child of these targets (Kh-I- AT interview)

Each department prepares what they call an 'assessment plan'. This is common for all the students with low academic attainment levels. The role of the class teacher is to specify the difficulty that the student faces and to follow the section of the assessment plan relating to the students' specific difficulty after that.

In inclusive schools, transferring the concept of an IEP to the Kuwaiti context has resulted in its alteration, meaning it no longer responds to individual needs but instead to group needs.

In order to better serve the needs of students with dyslexia, one-on-one classes for literacy and other skills are essential. While an Arabic teacher did discuss this, such classes are yet to be introduced in inclusive schools. He explained it as follows: "the dyslexic child needs to be provided with support and treatment in a one-on-one class to help him with the certain difficulty that he is struggling with" (Z-I-AT interview)

Lesson planning

Teachers agreed that lesson planning varied according to the education supervisors. They explained that the supervisors from the Ministry of Education or even the local municipal authority did not provide flexibility in adapting the curriculum to diverse situations. In addition to this, supervisors lacked the required experience in special education and in dealing with learning difficulties.

This differs according to the instructions given by the supervisor. The last supervisor used to ask for a differentiation of the questions based on students' level and for me to divide the class into levels, however, the current instructor does not ask for this. To be honest, teachers must be given more flexibility in adapting the curriculum according to the student's abilities and needs. Those officials do not have the experience in learning difficulties as teachers (Z-I-ET Interview).

This excerpt indicates that the potential to adjust lesson material based on student

level differed among inclusive schools. This represents inconsistencies in the approach of the educational supervisor and hinders the creation of a comprehensive and permanent set of formalised guidelines for adjusting the difficulty of lessons. One teacher mentioned that the lesson plan varied from one class to another according to the students' needs.

In my preparations (lesson plan), I write that I believe that the questions I will pose could be answered by Group A. My teaching methods also vary from one class to another. I am responsible for teaching two Year Five classes and there is a difference between the teaching methods used in one class compared to the other. As such, even the preparations are different, but not by much (MD-I-ET Interview).

The Arabic teacher from the same school stated that she also uses this method but she thinks that it is unnecessary to do so. "We place a marker next to these questions [to differentiate them], although I do not need these as I already know who the weaker students are through experience." (MD-I-AT Interview). Another teacher described her method as follows: "When I set my lesson plan I establish three objectives, one each for low, intermediate and excellent achievement levels" (Z-I-ET Interview). These responses demonstrate personalised coping methods in the absence of a standardised and formalised policy implemented consistently and across all schools.

At other schools, lesson plans are not adjusted at all. A teacher stated that their plan does not contain any provisions for students with dyslexia: "No, we don't mention that in our preparation." (Z-I-AT Interview)

The planning process for some teachers occurs through assessing the suitability of the questions in regards to the students' levels. This is done by making a mental note and not specifying it on paper, as stated by an English teacher: "While I write

my plan, I try to see whether the questions I intend to pose will be suitable for the specific groups and so on.” (Q-I-ET Interview)

In other inclusive schools, there was no variation in the teacher’s lesson planning, even when a class includes students with learning difficulties/dyslexia: “The preparations and assignments do not differ because the syllabus is the same for everyone, and they will be tested based on this.” (Kh-I-ET Interview). This is rather surprising, as an inclusive school educator should be more aware of the differing needs of dyslexic children. If all children are indeed to be tested in that way, then there should at least be a differentiation in the ways they are prepared for those tests, with special consideration being given to those with learning difficulties.

Overall, the support provided tends to be weak, vague, inconsistent or altogether absent. A rigid curriculum with little room for innovation and adjustment restricts space for insertion or omission, and focuses instead on quantity of information delivered. Planning for intervention was vague, and critically, it did not involve the child. Furthermore, the very notion of an Individual Learning Plan has been distorted in Kuwait and is now applied on a group basis. Aside from curriculum limitations, lesson adjustment was also hindered by inconsistent supervision. Because of this, the teachers are given varying degrees of autonomy in this regard. As a result, there is an absence of formalised and comprehensive guidelines for adjustment to be applied consistently and in every school. The greatest issue in many areas of dyslexia support, however, was its very absence in some contexts, as demonstrated by lesson / curriculum adjustment not being a consideration in some schools.

4.3.3 Inclusion of children with dyslexia

In this section, the perspectives and understandings of the inclusive school staff related to the concepts of inclusive education, and their attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with learning difficulties/dyslexia will be explored. These perspectives are important because they influence the implementation of inclusion practice in schools, as well as the quality of the support provided for children with learning difficulties/dyslexia.

A headteacher stated that: “My view is that the dyslexic children should not have been isolated in special schools” (Z-I-HT Interview). Conversely, a parent indicated that children with dyslexia have the right to be included as they are ‘normal’: “Dyslexia is not a disability; these children should not be separated from their classmates” (Z-I- Afnan’s Mother Interview).

While the notion of inclusion had its supporters, there were those who opposed it. One of the teachers expressed her refusal to include students with from learning difficulties and stressed: “I do not agree with it and do not want to engage with it” (Z-I-ET Interview).

A parent of one of the children with dyslexia sees the whole practice as ‘a show’. She said: “Everything that is done is acted out like a show and the work that is conducted is not honest work. If it was, we would have accomplished something by now” (Z-I- Afnan’s Mother Interview).

Purpose of inclusive education

Some interviewees agreed that the purpose of inclusion is to ‘normalise’ children with ‘learning difficulties’, as stated by one headteacher: “the goal is that the child

not to feel that he has been separated from his peers because he has learning difficulties.” (Z-I- HT Interview)

In a similar vein, an English teacher said regarding the purpose of inclusion, “It is to encourage the students and to make them feel like they are the same as their peers.

Also, it helps them to attend school without fear of being labelled.” (Q-I-ET interview)

Another thought on the idea of inclusion was: “They are not different from other students; they are like us, so why do we isolate them, even if society and the families feel differently? Inclusion means that children with Learning Difficulties are enrolled in the same school as everyone else” (Z-I-HT Interview).

Another main purpose of inclusion is to ‘socialise’ this group of children. It is worthy of mention that some participants saw inclusion as more socially than academically important: “Yes, their educational and social requirements from the school are being provided for because they are with their classmates in terms of social matters as opposed to being separated from them” (Z-I-HT Interview).

Endorsing the previous views, an Arabic teacher highlighted the importance of integration into society for a child with learning difficulties/dyslexia:

Paying attention to their psychological needs and letting them know that they are part of this society is important. They have neighbours, families and friends. They might be asked why they are alone in that school and not there with their brothers and sisters. Even the child himself would ask ‘why I am studying at this school and not with my sister or brother?’ (Z-I-AT interview)

Understanding inclusion

A headteacher expressed her views on including dyslexic children in mainstream schools: “I support this concept very much” Furthermore, she supported the trends

in increasing inclusion and commented: “I am for greater inclusion, and against increasing the number of specialised schools” (Z-I-HT Interview).

The confusion about the definition of inclusion, however, led to very different interpretations for the headteacher. She went on to contradict her previous quote by saying the following:

We have children who are slow learners, but the policy of the Ministry of Education is not to separate or isolate them to study in special schools. They have tried to include them with other normal students in Kuwaiti schools, but slow learners are different from those with learning difficulties; the former have talents but they can't use them – that is why they are transferred to specialised schools where they can be better looked after (Z-I-HT Interview).

Participants' views on inclusion contained several features that have been categorised under the following sub-headings:

Special classes

One understanding of inclusion was related to the position of special classes. An Arabic teacher gave her perspective on including children with dyslexia in mainstream schools by saying: “They are normal children and we do not exclude them, they just have special classes here in this school” (Z-I-AT Interview).

One of the school's psychologists said that inclusion of children with learning difficulties' has to be done in 'special classes in specialist schools' for the child's benefit:

Keeping children with learning difficulties in their schools will not help them. The teachers are not trained to deal with these students, and this will lower their attainment level and affect them psychologically. If we want to help them, we need to give them special classes in specialist schools (MD-I-Psychologist Interview).

She also said: “It is not possible to keep a dyslexic student in the same class as the other children, as you will not give them the attention that they need.” (MD-I-Psychologist Interview)

Some teachers accepted the idea of inclusion but stressed that it would have to involve ‘special classes’:

This is good (inclusion) in terms of psychological matters. The specialists have the final word; they know much better than me. I feel it is better to let them know that they have problem than separating them from their friends and putting them in special schools. It is better that they are with us in the normal schools but they should have special classes (Z-I-AT Interview).

Quite a different idea was suggested by an English teacher. She suggested that supplementary classes would help the students gain the skills they need. She said: “You can separate them from students who are average or high achievers, and then you will be able to focus on the skills that they need in assistance class” (Kh-I-ET Interview).

An English teacher from another school gave an alternative recommendation: “A special class for them, without letting other pupils know about this arrangement. Such a class will be provided for dyslexic pupils and they would have an easier curriculum” (Z-I-ET interview).

In some inclusive schools, this strategy has been put into practice already, as stated by the headteacher: “Here we have specialised classes in the same building. Children with learning difficulties have separate classes sometimes, but classes with ‘normal’ children for other subjects” (Z-I-HT Interview).

In contrast, others oppose this practice of special classes. One of the participants voicing this opposition was the headteacher of an inclusive mainstream school for

slow learning children. In the school, children are placed in special classes for slow learners and have their own teachers. They share only the location and the management staff.

She stated:

Inclusion means accommodating all the students in the same school, same classes and same activities. This is unlike the way it has been implemented for slow learning students. I am with full inclusion no matter what type of difficulty the child has. What matters is preparing the right sort of materials and environment” (Kh-I-HT Interview).

This view of inclusion may be influenced by the fact that her school separates ‘slow learning’ students in a different building and in special classes.

Right type of conditions

Some teachers accepted inclusion under certain conditions, for example, stating that inclusion: “is the inclusion of students who have learning difficulties with normal students but with the right sort of preparation, including teaching skills. Their inclusion would be better, but we need to reduce the number of students in the classroom” (MD-I-AT Interview).

Another teacher said: “Another goal is to integrate them into society from an early age, but this requires experience and skill from the teacher and a class size not in excess of 18 students. This is so that I can give each student the required attention.” (Q-I-ET Interview)

The idea of inclusion was also supported by one parent who affirmed that it had to be implemented along with support provided to the teachers. Afnan’s mother, who is also a teacher stated: “First of all, I am for this concept, but as a teacher, though I am in favour of inclusion, we need support.” (Afnan’s Mother Interview) Including

students with dyslexia in mainstream school demands more of the school management. In spite of the efforts made by the Model school, the headteacher admitted that there was a lack of arrangements and preparations in the inclusive schools to accommodate these cases: “Such a student requires more time, concentration and effort. We try as much as we can to provide support for these students, but we are not the same as the specialist schools” (MD-I-HT Interview).

Unsuitability of inclusion

Various views were expressed by participants on inclusion, with some expressing an outright rejection of its suitability or maybe possibility. This may be because they simply didn’t accept the idea, or perhaps they did have genuine concerns about its feasibility in the current educational and societal context. A key issue cited by participants was the additional attention required by dyslexic students, along with the failure of inclusive schools to meet their needs. A school psychologist stated: “It is not possible to keep a dyslexic student in the same class with the other children as you will not give them the attention that they need.” She pointed out that inclusion does not meet the child’s needs unless there is an ‘individual effort’: “No, inclusive schools do not meet the needs of a student with dyslexia, not unless there was an individual effort that was undertaken by a specific teacher who really wanted to help these students” (MD-I-Psychologist Interview)

Another psychologist preferred a ‘special school’ for children with learning difficulties. She expressed her view by saying: “I believe that it is better for students with learning difficulties to have their own special schools, and not because there is necessarily a

problem in their behaviour, but so that more attention can be paid to their needs” (Kh-I-Psychologist Interview).

For some participants’, inclusion was conditional, and only possible with special provision and arrangements. A school psychologist said: “This is not possible. Children with learning difficulties must have special provisions” (Kh-I- Psychologist Interview).

This argument was supported by a parent of a child that was in an inclusive school and then transferred to a Model school. This parent said: “I don’t know. I do not believe it works. The failure will increase year by year. Or it will only succeed if they reduce the difficulty of the syllabus and set suitable exams for those who are in need” (S-M-Yasser’s Mother Interview).

One teacher admitted that she cannot accommodate students with learning difficulties in her class and explained her view:

I cannot accommodate the needs of these children via normal classes. I believe that they need an easier syllabus, or one specially designed for them. This is because children with learning difficulties need to learn primary skills such as knowing letters, reading and also writing. This cannot be accomplished within the timeframe of a normal class where there are also 24 other students, although it could perhaps be done in the special classes I mentioned earlier (Kh-I-ET interview).

Another issue highlighted by teachers was that material was too advanced or challenging for students with dyslexia, hindering their ability to cope in mainstream classes.

Meeting the educational needs of those with dyslexia was viewed as key purpose of inclusion, but participants felt that this was not served by including them in mainstream school/ classes. A teacher gave a few reasons for this: “This is because

this action will attempt to provide for the development of skills that are suitable for students of that stage, however, this standard is too advanced for students who are suffering from learning difficulties. Therefore, I do not believe that inclusion achieved the goals it set out to accomplish” (Kh-I-ET interview).

An English teacher spoke from her teaching experience and wondered: “How can a student who suffers from Dyslexia deal with a third class curriculum? Just for one class period, there are fifteen new words. How can a dyslexic child learn to read and write 15 words in one class period? It can’t be” (Z-I-ET Interview).

Some teachers held strong opinions about which children could be included in mainstream schools. The biggest factor in shaping their attitudes was the severity of the disability, as stated by a school headteacher: “For those with extreme learning difficulties, I do not believe that inclusion is suitable for them because their standard is below average” (MD-I- HT Interview).

Children with dyslexia were regarded as easier to include in mainstream school but this seemed to depend on the severity of the condition: “Yes, I do not think that they need to be in special schools apart from those with severe conditions who cannot follow the normal school syllabus. Students with such conditions need extra attention” (MD-I-ET Interview).

Another schoolteacher said: “If it was severe, then they should be transferred to special schools where the students are fewer in number and the syllabus has been simplified. This will also allow the student to get what he deserves in terms of care without affecting the rest of the class.” (MD-I-ET Interview)

Equally, the vice principal of one of the inclusive schools stated: “If they have minor difficulties, then I think it would be possible.” She also added: “I do not think our schools are prepared to handle severe cases” (Q-I-DH Interview).

Another concern underlined by participant views was that including dyslexic children it would actually lower their attainment level, leading to an aggravation of psychological harm. An English teacher pointed out: “the majority would not benefit from this because inclusion of this type is not suitable for those suffering from severe [educational] weakness” (Kh-I- ET interview). Another teacher gave the same reason for not including children with learning difficulties/dyslexia, saying: “It would be better for her to be transferred, in terms of psychological benefit, because her level is lower than that of her classmates, and she has suffered from that” (Z-I-ET Interview).

To support her argument, she cited a case she encountered through her teaching experience. At the end of this example she said “You would not believe me if I said to you that she was different girl [sic] after they moved her to special classes for slow learners. She talks, she has friends and I said to her teacher that she has really changed” (Z-I- ET Interview) .

For some teachers, if including a child would negatively affect the majority of the children, then they believed that child should be excluded. This opinion was expressed by one of the participants:

No, this is going to have an effect on other in the class, as children with learning difficulties will not have a comprehensive learning experience, which they have a right to. If I pay more attention to them only, I will not be providing the learning experience that other normal students are entitled to (Z-I-AT Interview).

Insufficient training was another issue highlighted by participants, which reflected a concern based on the underdeveloped support infrastructure for dyslexic children. A

school psychologist stated that teachers are not trained to deal with children with learning difficulties by saying: “Keeping children with learning difficulties in their schools will not help them. The teachers are not trained for dealing with these students, and this will lower their attainment level and affect them psychologically.” (MD-I- Psychologist interview)

For some members of staff, inclusion was associated with their beliefs in regards to improving the skills of dyslexic children and the idea that dyslexia can be overcome. Accordingly, they suggested excluding students with dyslexia/learning difficulties for a ‘limited time’. As an Arabic teacher stated:

These [dyslexic] students require additional treatment through the use of centres or in other ways I do not know about. For them to complete their state education, they need treatment. Perhaps that student can, for a limited time, go to a specialist school like the S Model school and then return to her original school if treatment is available. This is for students with extreme learning difficulties (MD-I-AT Interview).

In summary, the understanding and attitudes regarding inclusion amongst participants in this study varied between uncertainty, encouragement and being against inclusion in location only, i.e. separating these children into special classes, as well full inclusion that requires no limitations in the mainstream educational system. The understanding of inclusion will be discussed further in the following chapter point 5.5.1.

4.3.4 Beyond the school: Analysis within the case

In the current study, the focus was directed towards the school experience of interviewed students with learning difficulties/dyslexia. In doing so, I sought to provide further insight into the issues concerning the support provided for students with dyslexia and learning difficulties in general in Kuwaiti primary schools.

Case Study: Afnan

Afnan, in Year 5, has been diagnosed as dyslexic. This was a key factor in her being selected as a case, as many students will be diagnosed with more general learning difficulties. Furthermore, this was the only case within the inclusive schools where the mother consented to be interviewed. The diagnosis took place at the KDA. Her mother, who is a teacher, identified her main difficulties as reading and writing in the Arabic and English languages, in addition to in Mathematics to a lesser extent, as her reports confirmed. In Afnan's first two years in school her difficulties were not identified by the teachers. Before her parents faced the fact that Afnan had some difficulties, her mother was aware of the early signs. According to her mother, she knew that there was something amiss with Afnan, as she states below:

When my daughter was in Year 1, I noticed that she was forgetting a lot and that she couldn't distinguish between some letters. She used to make writing mistakes although her teachers were praising her. I felt there was something wrong with my daughter. This feeling made me anxious. The situation was the same in year two; even when she wrote her father's name "Khalid", she didn't know where to put the dots. I used to help her with examples in order to remember, but she used to forget the words (Afnan's Mother Interview).

In year three, the teacher highlighted some issues regarding Afnan and reported that to her mother. The description used by the teacher was not acceptable for Afnan's mother:

Her marks were even lower in the third class. In a notable way, her teacher informed me that there was a problem with my daughter. She used to tell me "your daughter is depressed", but I wouldn't let her say this because my daughter is not like that. She is good, but I thought there was a problem with her that is preventing her from reading or writing, and remembering the letters.

The Kuwaiti educational system allows the child to move to the next grade in the first three years of primary education without holding students back. This is done to give

the child a chance to persevere in the first three grades in the hope that she can catch up with her peers. This effectively prevents any early intervention from the school to support children who have learning difficulties:

During the Parents Assembly, I used to tell them that my daughter suffers from dyslexia. The problem with the system here is that there is no mechanism for failure for the first three years, so they could not discover the issue – all students move from one year to the next. I believe this has caused mounting problems 'among the students (Afnan's Mother Interview).

The teacher's comments and concerns about Afnan's progress led the mother to talk to another teacher, who then confirmed that there was a problem. This made the mother think that since the school did not raise any issues regarding diagnoses there was a need to take action and try to seek a diagnosis for her daughter:

Then, I talked to her teachers, who used to say to me, "Your daughter is clever but she mixes up the letters". It seemed that there was a problem with her. One of the teachers brought up the topic of dyslexia, and told me that there is a centre for those with reading difficulties in Al-Emairia area. An advertisement on the wall grabbed my attention and before that I had watched a TV interview with the director of the centre, about Educational Difficulties. I visited them and talked to the psychology specialist. I arranged an appointment with her to test my daughter. I brought her notebooks with me to the interview. When the psychologist saw her writings and how she mixed up letters, she said to me "My initial impression is that your daughter may suffer from dyslexia, but I can't provide firm judgment now without carrying out several tests on her". She did so, and decided that my daughter suffers from dyslexia. Then she set treatment sessions in Arabic language. She said to us that if my daughter passed those tests successfully, she would carry out a further test in English language (Afnan's Mother Interview).

Despite the mother's provision of a formal diagnosis, the teachers were in doubt about the validity of the report, as Afnan scored full marks in her Arabic and English dictation (spelling tests). The school informed her mother that her daughter was fine and doing well, but the mother insisted that Afnan had been diagnosed, and that she should have the right to use her diagnoses. Her Arabic teacher stated that: "Afnan

is not suffering from learning difficulties or dyslexia and she has no problems in spite of that she was diagnosed by the Kuwaiti Dyslexia Association. She does not need any special attention” (Z-I-AT interview).

The English teacher also supported this view and stated: “I do not see her suffering from any problems and her grades in English language are acceptable.” (Z-I-ET interview) Her mother described the school’s reaction to Afnan’s difficulties:

I provided them with the information provided to me by the KAD. There are instructions, such as that the dyslexic should sit at the front of the class, that teachers should give them extra time to write, and not pick on them, because they suffer from shyness. In the beginning, the teachers considered or took these instructions seriously, but then they became careless. My daughter does not sit in the front row of the class and the teacher punishes her. The teacher also wipes the board quickly, so she can’t write from the board. Then I visited them, asking them to pay more attention.

These quotes support the interpretation that little, if any intervention exists in the school to support Afnan’s dyslexia. The lack of awareness regarding dyslexia was another reason for the mother’s dissatisfaction with her daughter’s current school: “I hope to raise their awareness and knowledge for all about dyslexia. I got tired and no one would understand me when I talked about my daughter’s dyslexia.”

She also stated that Afnan’s awareness of her difficulty helped a lot to overcome it:

What was helpful was that my daughter was also aware of the problem; she used to say, “I forgot the letters, I have a problem”. She also used to say, “The girls told me that I can’t be good”. My answer to her was that “You are good but you have dyslexia”

Despite the difficulties that she experienced in the school, such as the attitude of the other children, the aspect Afnan liked most about her school was her friends, which emphasises the sense of belonging. She showed a satisfaction and happiness in her current school. “In school, everything is beautiful” (Afnan).

Her mother pointed out that she was not in favour of transferring Afnan to a Model school. Her rationale for this was that dyslexia was not a disability and, as such, a transfer to a special school was unnecessary. She distinguished between disabilities and dyslexia and stated: “As a parent I say that dyslexia is not a disability. My eldest son has Down’s Syndrome, so I know the difference between disability and dyslexia sufferers or those with related difficulties”.

I asked the mother about the support provided to Afnan after the results appeared, with dyslexia. She mentioned extensive support lessons provided through the KDA:

We used to go to treatment sessions after school. I knew that this was a further pressure on her, but that it was for her benefit. After those treatment sessions, I noticed some improvement in her status, and she liked that. Although they decided to have three sessions a week at the Head Office of the Kuwaiti Association for Dyslexia, the specialist increased this to daily sessions (Afnan’s Mother Interview).

Afnan agreed with her mother that she performed better and that her improvements happened with the help of her mother: “My mother helps me during my revision, she brings me teachers to help me in the house. These teachers help me at home and I also study in the centre” (Afnan).

To gain more understanding of school practice and the support provided, Afnan was observed in two classes: English and Arabic. In both, she appeared confident, quiet and well behaved. Afnan, however, only participated when she was asked to, and sometimes she would go silent and not answer the questions. In Arabic, she was not fully engaged, perhaps due to being absent for few days due to health reasons. She was also struggling badly in reading, compared to her classmates. For instance:

During Arabic language lesson the teacher talks most of the time. Afnan didn’t participate. The teacher asked one of the girls to read the lesson. The teacher

then stopped her and asked another student to complete. Then the teacher asked Afnan to read. Afnan was just repeating the words after the teacher. She was struggling to carry on without help. She was not even trying, she was just waiting for the teacher to read to repeat after her (Z-I- Arabic Lesson Observation).

When asked, the Arabic teacher attributed Afnan's lack of participation to her absence, and said that she did not need 'extra attention'. The teacher thus asked Afnan's mother to let her go back to normal examinations with her classmates, but as stated earlier the mother insisted that Afnan had been diagnosed as dyslexic, which gives her the right to be examined separately. Afnan said in this regard: "Yes, they read the exam for me, but they do not write it. If I write the wrong word, they advise me to correct it. They tell us about spelling. I do the exam in front of a special exam board." She then added: "My mother arranged for it in order to help me in the exam. I think it is helpful as I got extra help when I am alone." (Afnan) This shows that although she did not receive additional help in class, exam support was provided. This should be seen as a shortcoming of current practice – dyslexic students are improving literacy skills, but rather simply being corrected at the assessment stage to boost their results.

Afnan's schooling experiences were an example of the understanding of her parents' perceptions in regards to inclusive education. I asked her mother about implementing full inclusion in Kuwaiti schools and she replied: "For the student to be among his colleagues and not to feel failure, because he is not disabled, he only has a problem, which can be treated, and if you segregate them, this is a problem; what are the benefits, then? Nothing!". Given this view, Afnan's mother stressed the need for raising the awareness of dyslexia before taking any actions.

4.3.5 Understanding practice in Model schools

Identification

The process of identification in the Model school does not exist in the same form as at the inclusive school. This is due to the aforementioned requirement for the child to be diagnosed with 'learning difficulties' in order for them to meet the criteria for transfer to Model schools. For one of these schools, tests were conducted to determine the student's IQ, as explained by a headteacher:

We carry out further tests on those pupils who have already been diagnosed with a learning difficulty, in order to estimate their levels of intelligence through IQ tests. If the child is below intermediate level, then he will be transferred to another school (S-M-HT interview).

With such IQ tests having already been conducted in order to diagnose the child, I asked the headteacher why this needed to be repeated, to which she replied:

I do not let my teachers waste their time and effort on hopeless cases. The child does not get any benefit and his place is really in another school. Of 91 students assessed in the school this academic year, there were only four who are not specific learning difficulty diagnosed (S-M-HT interview).

This calls into question the validity of the diagnoses process, as well as making it clear that the previous school psychologist's time and effort were used inefficiently . IQ tests will have already been performed and the student would only be referred to the Model school if their score was 85 or above, meaning that the test is done twice for no apparent reason.

The other headteacher mentioned that the local authority provided the school with a list of students that had been diagnosed with 'learning difficulties'. She discussed the local authority's role as follows:

First, we will receive a list from the local authority, with the name of the students that are going to join the school for the next academic year. Then I call their schools and contact the parents to arrange an introductory meeting. This is followed by getting the parents' permission for their child to join the school (JK-M- HT interview).

She also stated that the school does not distinguish between cases.

All the students come with 'learning difficulties' diagnoses. Most of their difficulties are in more than one aspect, such as reading, writing and maths. We provide a foundation assessment for all the students, for instance, testing them in regards to the alphabet. If the teacher acknowledges mastery of a skill through the one to one sessions, this skill can be replaced with something else the student struggles with (JK-M- HT interview).

A similar process at the other Model school was conducted; tests were, however, carried out by the class teacher to measure the student's skills and achievements.

This was stated by the headteacher as follows:

So, after the teacher tests him, she measures his ability and achievement, to determine what he can be good at and the things that he can't be good at. She lists the activities that he is not able to do. In this record, she lists activities in order, according to their abilities and she ticks them one by one, marking whether he can or can't complete them. If he has completed one activity, he will move to the next, and will repeat the ones that he didn't complete, until he shows improvements. (S-M-HT interview)

One of the psychologists stated: "After I finish with him or her, the child is observed by the class teacher (JK-M-Psychologist interview). The psychologist from the other school said: "After the diagnosis is over, every teacher puts together his or her plan" (S-M-Psychologist interview).

In both of the above quotes, psychologists suggested that their role starts and ends with diagnosis, which displays a shortcoming in the system and a lack of integration of educational procedures undertaken to assist the inclusion of dyslexic students.

Due to psychologists holding a more specialised knowledge of special needs matters, it was expected that their role would extend further.

Alternatively, the teachers can be better trained in the area of special needs to better fulfil their duties, and participate in the identification process. Some teachers valued the training they received in developing their identification abilities. One stated: “Through the training provided by the CCET, we learned about various cases, what they are, and how to identify them. So, we became better able to identify them” (S-M-ET interview) Some teachers, however, also recognise that identification of children with dyslexia or any type of learning difficulties is not always possible, as it may depend on an individual case and his or her symptoms. This was explained by an English teacher: “Not in all cases. I need to spend some time with them and I need to carry out a review, though not always” (S-M-ET Interview).

Barriers to identification

The vast majority of the students in this study were not labelled as “dyslexic”. Instead the term used was the more general ‘learning difficulties’.

Diagnoses are often not conducted until the child has consistently failed, further demonstrating an attainment-centric approach. A school psychologist stated that the earlier the action is taken, the more effectively the child can be supported “The headteacher would say it is better to take pupils from the first grade rather than third grade; she prefers that because it is better to discover the child’s difficulty at the beginning, and not after two years” (S-M- Psychologist Interview).

The importance of diagnosis was recognised by parents, yet it appeared that in some cases, parents were not willing to accept this diagnosis, or even that there was a

problem to begin with, before the diagnosis process had begun. One of the policy documents alludes to this by stating: “Diagnosing learning difficulties is often neglected by the parents, believing that they are part of the individual's natural personality traits.” (Model schools’ policy) It is natural, however, that parents are more familiar with the difficulties experienced by their child, as they spend far more time with the child than the teacher. Children may also be more vocal with their parents about the difficulties that they are facing. On the other hand, it appeared that the deciding factor in whether or not to take a child for assessment was their academic results. This was interpreted from Yasser’s mother’s statement: “I found out that my son was failing in all his subjects. After that, I thought that there must be something wrong with my son”.

Some parents also faced difficulty accepting a label that would be linked to the diagnosis and the child transferring schools. Ali’s mother highlighted that by stating:

So, if his relatives asked “where does your child study?” we answer with the name of a mainstream school, which is a governmental public school, rather than “He studies in school known to be a learning difficulty school or what is called a Model school” (S-M-Ali’s Mother Interview).

This can lead some parents to resist the school’s efforts to transfer the child. For this reason, parents hide that their child has a ‘learning difficulty’ and try to avoid diagnoses that would lead to a separation of the child from the mainstream school. Taking this into account, it was a priority within the Model school’s policy that the school should concentrate on raising parents’ awareness to reap the greatest benefit in achieving the school objectives. This was outlined by the document as: “To provide the parents with training opportunities so they may be able to identify

learning difficulties and ways of dealing with them, thus enabling them to help their children in a caring home environment” (Model schools’ policy).

An Arabic teacher at one of the Model schools said that one of the barriers they face in developing these schools is the lack of awareness of such cases. The teacher stated:

In terms of finance, there aren’t any problems here in Kuwait, but what we need is to increase people’s awareness and explain more to them about this group of children, such as through TV, training, seminars, radio, etc. That was the most important objective to us in the opening of this school (S-M-AT Interview).

For some schools, work has already begun, as one headteacher described:

We carried out training courses for the parents of the children; they expressed their happiness and satisfaction with regards to the benefits of these courses. This is because in the past they didn’t have any idea about their children’s cases and how to deal with them. They carried out visits to our classes, and they said “You have educated us in how to treat our children; how to be patient and provide them with knowledge” (S-M-HT Interview).

Yasser’s mother acknowledged this as well and stated:

When the school started, somebody came to us from the CCET. He explained to us the meaning of learning difficulties, i.e. that it is not that the child is stupid or lazy, but he or she may be clever and have other good qualities. He also explained more about these difficulties, and about overall weaknesses in the educational system. It is just that the child forgets (S-M-Yasser’s Mother’s Interview).

The current situation was compared to that of the previous years by one of the teachers: “There are services that aim to increase parents’ awareness regarding Learning Difficulties. There are workshops and seminars. It was not like this as recently as two or three years ago” (S-M-ET Interview).

As demonstrated by the data in this section, two parallel processes exist for identification at Model and inclusive schools. Although a child comes to the Model

school with a learning difficulty diagnosis, the Model school will carry out further tests, seemingly to assess the severity of the condition and if the case is too severe, the child will be referred to another school. This appears to be a rather uncoordinated and inefficient identification process, but it also means that Model schools focus on less severe types of learning difficulties.

Once in the Model school system, progress on individual skills and types of activities is monitored, and once the child has achieved certain targets in these areas, they can focus on another area. It is the teachers, rather than the psychologists, who are responsible for identifying areas for improvement and deciding when these skills have been mastered. This could present a problem, as psychologists hold more specialised knowledge in the field of learning difficulties. Teachers, however, also appreciated additional training given to them and appeared to be prepared to bear the responsibility of identification and subsequent supervision.

There were several issues with the way in which identification was performed. Schools would only initiate the testing process if a child would consistently fail, which would then appear at a delayed stage in the child's education. This would consequently lead to a slow response to their condition. While parents recognised that diagnoses were important to assisting their children, they were often reluctant to accept these diagnoses. This is largely linked to the issue of societal taboo and labelling, particularly as a transfer to the Model school would be a clear indication to many that the child has a learning difficulty. As such, the transfer is often resisted. This is largely an issue of awareness, which was touched upon by the Model school

staff, who initially seek to inform parents, and by extension society as a whole. This will be discussed in section 5.3 in the discussion chapter

4.3.6 Supporting children with dyslexia

Inside the Model classroom (observation)

The organisation of furniture in the Model school classroom was similar to that of the inclusive school. The significant difference between the two schools was the number of children in the classroom. In the Model schools, the maximum number of students in the classroom does not exceed 10. This is the case because all the enrolled students are diagnosed with 'learning difficulties'. The class teacher has the right to change the classroom arrangement, as well as the type of activity to be taught, to suit the children's needs. The children had drawers with their photos which allowed them to have personal space. Teachers used a 'Reward Board' on which the teacher displayed photos of students with exemplary grades and behaviour. Model classrooms included interactive learning resources such as smart boards, computers and other electronic equipment. Despite these differences, similar curricula were taught and observed in both types of schools' classrooms but different approaches were pursued in Model schools. These included the teacher's use of learning through playing interactive learning games in some lessons as well as a variation in methods and materials. As mentioned earlier, Arabic and English lessons were observed in each classroom. The following are examples of the methods used in the observed lessons.

Arabic lesson

In one of the Arabic lessons observed at a Model school, the teacher started the lesson with a video scene played on the board followed by some pictures. Children had to use sentences that suited each picture. The teacher selected children to answer by randomly picking names from a basket. The question to be answered appeared on the slideshow on the board. She was also repeating key words more than once to make sure that every single child knew exactly what was required of them. She stressed some letters to avoid confusion. Writing and copying from the board was not a challenge in terms of clarity, rather it was simply a matter of providing enough time for the children. The teacher was, however, only using only a black coloured pen which is different from the English lesson where many colours were used. This lack of consistency points to the need for a singular and consistent teaching strategy for every subject.

When writing on the whiteboard and reading aloud as she wrote, the teacher used very clear language; short sentences, and varied her tone of voice in an animated way, engaging the students. She also showed her appreciation for effort and encouraged the children all the time, which provided a stress-free environment. In regards to reading, the teacher did not ask all the boys to read, as this depended on the nature of the lesson. In the part of the lesson that involved reading, she thus selected the boys whose turn it was to present their work to read for the class.

Another facilitation used by Model schools was what they described as a 'reading ruler'. This was a laminated card with a rectangle the size of a line text that is placed around the lines as the child moves through the text. This simple but effective tool

helps the child focus through reading. The tool is made at a low cost, with students admitting that it had helped them to improve their reading capabilities.

English lesson

This English lesson was observed in another Model school. The teacher began by collectively addressing the students when introducing the lesson topic on the smart board. The teacher used a mix of collective teaching and collaborative and independent learning. A dice was used to select children randomly to answer questions that appeared on the board in English. For example, as a vocabulary drill, students were not simply given the spelling of words, but rather, had to decipher their meaning, with the teacher asking on one occasion: 'if you have too many sweets you will have..?' and showing headache, toothache and cold on the smart board. The teacher then reinforced the new vocabulary using a white board and coloured pens and checked off individual understanding. The children were then instructed to work independently, doing an exercise to search for words in the dictionary, for a short time. After this they spent time copying from the board. This was followed by pair work, where they put the new vocabulary into sentences.

Model schools pursued a different method of behaviour reinforcement, in which the problems in children's actions are explained to them and they are then allowed to choose their type of punishment. One example of this was when Yasser was disrupting the lesson by distracting the teacher. Instead of being immediately reprimanded, he was warned on multiple occasions.

The significance of this approach to discipline is that children are made to understand their errors and avoid them in the future. They are also not humiliated in

front of their classmates, which is essential in building and preserving confidence in children with learning difficulties. This is used along with a reward system (e.g. The Reward Board). In contrast, these methods were mostly not present at the inclusive schools, or were used inconsistently. It could be said that the Model schools' discipline system constitutes a 'carrot and stick' approach, which encourages accountability for actions, and keeps children involved in the class and motivated even if they have misbehaved, rather than being made to feel excluded and discouraged by a series of punishments.

The curriculum

Model schools share the same curriculum with mainstream inclusive schools, as mentioned earlier. Teachers at Model schools stated that they adapted the curriculum according to the students' ability. In addition, Model schools offer one to one classes, each lesson to be delivered according to the child's individual needs; starting from reviewing the alphabet to helping the student cope and keep pace with the curriculum taught in class.

One-to-one classes provide what the child needs in the essential subjects or their foundations. We insist on giving them these basic materials because they are the foundation of any subject. These are like private classes, though they take place within the group classes. Also, the number of students in a class has a great impact (S-M-AT Interview).

A teacher also pointed out that the level of the subject was inappropriate for students with learning difficulties and highlighted their inability to modify the curriculum in order to better respond to the needs of dyslexic children.

We demanded that they get a special curriculum for learning difficulties because the amount that is being given to them is too large and they can't learn all of it. The skills required are numerous and difficult. Instead they could perhaps give

us a requirement for the minimum amount of material to be covered and we would modify the curriculum to what suits every level (JK-M-AT Interview).

The only adaptation possible would, however, be material omission. The findings indicated that the omission strategy was the first choice of teachers who faced challenges with the current curriculum. In Model schools, there was the flexibility to omit some topics if teachers decided that they did not correspond with a student's level. For example, one said:

I left out some lessons because the words are difficult for students with learning difficulties and it is not easy for them to learn a massive amount of new vocabulary and its meaning. It is more useful to focus on quality and not quantity in learning. English is not practiced and used except here in the school. Therefore, for children with learning difficulties it will be difficult to understand and learn. So, when we informed the supervisor, she just asked us to skip it (JK-M-ET Interview).

Another factor taken into consideration would be whether or not the lesson was appropriate for students' level in terms of difficulty and quantity, with teachers opting to allocate more lesson time to certain subjects in the interests of teaching quality over quantity.

Intervention planning

Information regarding intervention planning will be explored in the following section. Prior to undertaking this research, it had been expected that Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) would be found in the school system, or at least within the Model schools. In actuality, such information was not found in either context. Model schools, however, followed a certain procedure before setting an intervention plan for the student. A headteacher explained:

The teacher lists activities according to their abilities and she ticks them one by one, marking whether the child can or cannot keep pace with their classmates.

If he / she has completed one activity, then the child can progress to the next activity, and will repeat the ones which he / she has failed to complete until improvements are observed (S-M-HT Interview).

A school psychologist stated that such intervention plans are the teacher's responsibility: "After the diagnosis is complete, every teacher puts together her plan" (S-M-Psychologist Interview).

The difference between Model and inclusive schools is that all students were diagnosed as students with 'learning difficulties' in Model schools. A teacher at one of the schools described this:

...we hold a test and keep a special record, and have an individual plan for each student. We put her photo in the record, and it stays with her from the date it was created until she graduates. We put the date, submitted assignment, its related skill, the level of parental follow up, as well as a test to assess the given skill and whether the student has mastered it or not (JK-M-AT Interview).

The purpose of conducting the test is thus to determine the type of difficulty that each child faces. This means that one-on-one classes can be better targeted to meet student needs. One student, however, found these classes to be stressful rather than helpful. She said: "They give us a lot of homework, and if I don't do any, the one-on-one teachers tell on me to the other teacher" (JK-M-Lateefah Interview). This means that individual classes are merely additional academic pressure and should perhaps be better targeted at providing support and avoid further adding to existing academic pressure.

One-to-one classes (Model schools only)

Model school teachers claimed that they believed that every child in the class had his or her individual needs. They, however, shared the same diagnosis of 'learning difficulties'. There was a 'treatment plan' for each child prepared by the class teacher

(usually for Arabic, English and Mathematics). “There are individual support options, such as one-on-one classes in Arabic, Mathematics and English. This method helps pupils by teaching them to recognise letters and numbers as well as taking dictations” (S-M-Psychologist Interview). A headteacher stressed that the plans for the one to one class are made for each child individually and according to the student’s needs by saying: “I have an individual plan for each child. For example, even if there are two children suffering from the same learning difficulty, there are individual differences between them which we have to think about.” (S-M-HT Interview). This should not to be confused with the IEP, which is a broader target setting document. The plans discussed by the headteacher were for day to day learning needs in one to one classes.

One to one classes were seen by an Arabic teacher as one of the approaches to meet the needs of dyslexic students. she stated: “we don’t hold back any effort to give the students what they need. And I repeat, we need more of the individual (one to one) classes.” (JK-M-AT interview)

Lesson planning

The planning and preparation of lessons in Model schools was widely reported to take into account students’ difficulties within the national curriculum. It was claimed that through adjustment and omission of certain aspects of this curriculum, lessons would be better suited to pupils. Lesson planning in Model schools included some details regarding the adjustment of the lesson to meet the needs of all the students.

One teacher described the process as such:

Yes, our way of setting objectives has to be more suitable for children with learning difficulties. There are objectives that can’t be achieved so we improve

those objectives according to what we think the pupil needs. Also, in our preparation of the questions, we have to decide which students are able to answer each specific question. (S-M-AT Interview)

The school's English teacher supported that view and stated: "Yes, you have to provide more details and you need to write the names of the students who you think are going to answer each question, to reach the objectives of the lesson." (S-M-ET Interview). The Arabic teacher pointed out, however, that it was the individual classes that were adjusted, rather than the curriculum or group classes, he stated "My preparation does not change nor does the curriculum. What changes are the individual classes (one-on-one) and the worksheets given." (JK-M-AT interview)

4.3.7 Inclusion of children with dyslexia

Model schools serve as important providers of support for dyslexic children, but this support comes at the cost of isolating the child from his school and peers. Model school staff and parents were interviewed to shed light on their understandings and attitudes toward inclusion in mainstream schools. It is noteworthy that Model school teachers have had previous experience working in inclusive schools, and can provide valuable comparative insights between the two types of school.

Purpose of inclusive education

The objective of inclusive schools is to seek the implementation of the general objectives of the Ministry of Education so that they become a reality, in addition to various other goals. One of the Model school's objectives regarding inclusion as stated in their documents is: "To secure an inclusive education environment which enables students with learning difficulties to achieve their highest educational and social potential" (Model schools policy).

The study participants held varying views as to the goal of inclusion. The psychologist explained that one of these was to prevent the isolation of students from their peer group: “I prefer that. It is good for the student not to feel that he is segregated or separated from his classmates. If children are placed in other schools, some ask: ‘why have you been set apart from our school?’” (S-M-Psychologist interview).

Another stated objective was for to not feel different from their peers. This was explained by a school psychologist: “It is to ensure the dyslexic child does not feel like ‘I am in a special school so I have a problem and that is why I have been separated’” (S-M- Psychologist Interview)

Moreover, she talked about the feelings of the child with learning difficulties in this situation:

Some children have brothers or sisters, so if we take one of them to a special school, then the child could feel that it is his problem. Other students say to him: ‘you are in this school because you are lazy or stupid or not clever’ (S-M-Psychologist Interview)

Inclusion might also have psychological objectives in addition to avoiding the labelling of children, as identified by one of the psychologists:

Those matters have psychological effects and can impact on a child’s personality greatly. So the best thing is to leave him in his school, but to keep track of him without allowing his classmates to know about his status (S-M-Psychologist Interview).

Avoiding stigma is one of the purposes of inclusion, as identified by some participants. One teacher stated that some parents preferred to avoid transferring their children to the Model schools so as to prevent them from being labelled as having learning difficulties:

There are parents who do not want their children to be in special learning difficulties schools, but with inclusive schools the children will be looked after, without letting them feel that they are labelled as having a learning difficulty. In other words, inclusion reduces the social impact of having a learning difficulty on the child (S-M- AT Interview).

Supporting this opinion, the English teacher said: “Some people do not like their children to be in special or Model schools such as this one. Some parents even refuse to allow their children to attend these schools” (S-M- ET Interview)

Understanding inclusion

According to the interview data, interviewees had contradictory personal perceptions of inclusion. The first issue to be highlighted was that some participants were uncertain about the meaning of ‘inclusion’, Yasser’s mother was asked about her view regarding including children with dyslexia in mainstream schools, and she asked the following in response:

Do you mean where they mix the normal students with those with learning difficulties? The answer is ‘No’. This process doesn’t work, the two groups are different. One of them has different needs to the other. I doubt that such a project works (S-I- Yasser’s Mother’s Interview).

Special classes

Attitudes towards the inclusion of children with learning difficulties/dyslexia differ according to the type of disability. In this study, some participants were less welcoming to inclusion. They said that acceptance for inclusion of children with a disability is influenced by the school’s ability to accommodate that child’s needs, as well as the severity of the difficulty. An illustrative quote was provided by a school psychologist: “If we want them to benefit, we need to give them special classes in specialist schools.”(JK-M-Psychologist Interview)

The right type of schools

One of the interviewed headteachers stated that all-inclusive schools in Kuwait were able to accommodate children with dyslexia.

All the primary schools are able to receive pupils with learning difficulties, but difficult cases need one on one sessions, and it is hard to provide these at normal schools. So I think these cases should be sent to a specialised school, to be treated, with the aim of then returning to their schools (S-M-HT interview).

Some of the study participants discussed the dilemma between full inclusion and other forms of inclusion. This is an issue that schools face when they try to include children with SEN. A group of participants were in support of “only limited inclusion”.

An Arabic teacher said:

Limited inclusion perhaps means a reduction of the number of students in class, and including one or two of those children with learning difficulties. That is fine, but to include them in these normal classes, as is the case now, is not beneficial for the children with learning difficulties. The teacher cannot monitor their work, as he or she cannot give them the attention they deserve with only limited inclusion (S-M-AT Interview).

Inclusion after overcoming the difficulty

Inclusion was mentioned in the school documents. These documents set out that children with ‘learning difficulties’ can be re-introduced into inclusive schools as long as they overcome their difficulty.

To include students with learning difficulties within the educational district once again after a sufficient period of time, wherein they can overcome their hardship, as well as having others continue their studies in a manner that suits the level of difficulty they face (Model schools Policy).

This portrays inclusion as something that is only possible once a child’s difficulty has been alleviated, implying that it cannot be achieved within an inclusive environment and that inclusive schools are only suitable for those who have already been treated.

An English teacher compared her experiences in both inclusive and Model schools by saying:

I think it is ultimately better for them to be in a specialised school. I can tell you from my own experience, as I worked in an inclusive school in addition to this school (specialised/Model school). I discovered the great benefits pupils get when they are in specialised schools (S-M-ET Interview).

By comparing between her experiences at the Model and inclusive school, the teacher pointed out that children with learning difficulties/dyslexia benefited more from the Model school environment than the inclusive one. This is, however, based off an evaluation of inclusion in its current form in Kuwait, and is not a conclusive dismissal of the concept of inclusion as a whole.

4.3.8 Beyond the school: Analysis within the case

This section will analyse the children included in the case study, along with their parents, in order to better understand the experiences of students of dyslexia within Model schools.

I sought to combine data from different sources: children's interviews, parents' interviews, observation, and some of the teachers' comments.

Case study: Yasser

Yasser is a 12 year-old boy, enrolled in a Model school for learning difficulties and was in Year Five at the time of the study. His primary schooling had involved much struggle and failure, according to his mother. His major difficulties were in reading and writing Arabic, as he failed in Year 4 and repeated this grade. He joined his current school last year, because he was showing significantly low achievement levels across his subjects. His mother talked about his journey through the schooling system.

He was in another school before this one. I consider this school as a form of educational and psychological therapy for him. I mean, he has improved in all subjects, even in those he used to fail. Before, he could not read and write Arabic, but now he can. He is now happy and has an interest in learning. Now he says to me, “I am upset – why did I not get good marks?” (Yasser’s Mother’s Interview)

Yasser’s mother identified his difficulties as being in reading and writing, as his reports/statements confirmed. The psychologist’s report showed an IQ of 95. Being held back across all subjects and his short memory had led to his mother’s insistence to diagnose him after she had been advised to do so by her sister and thought it would help Yasser to learn better. Yasser’s mother stated:

I heard about dyslexia when he was in Year 4. I talked to my sister about my son’s problem – that he was showing an increased weakness in understanding. She said that there was a Centre for Child Education and Teaching (CCET). In this centre, they test students who have difficulties in learning. They diagnose the problem and then they admit your son to the community group. I said to her I didn’t know about this; she said to me, “Believe me, take him, this is for his benefit”. I thought deeply about this, and I found out that my son was failing in all his subjects. After that, I thought that there must be something wrong with my son. So I cried and cried, then I took him to the centre. Even the person who carried out the test on my son said that he’s a sociable child that can touch the heart; he’s charming, thanks be to God. He said that it’s not a big deal that he’s got difficulty in talking – he’d sometimes remember things but sometimes forget as well. Again, this happens quite often. My son said to me once that he likes mathematics, English and Arabic. They diagnosed him in Arabic; from there, I found that he has a gradually built up weakness in reading. But now, he can read and if you ask me how, I will tell you this is because of this school! God bless them (Yasser’s Mother’s Interview).

Her efforts in arranging the process of diagnosing Yasser presented the opportunity for his transfer to the Model school. Yasser agreed with his mother that he performed better and he said that he loves his current school. A substantial outcome of interviews with children from the Model schools was that they could compare their experiences with the inclusive classes in their previous mainstream schools with

their current classes in the 'model' setting. He talked about the difficulties that he faced in the previous school: "This school is better. In my previous school they used to beat us, but here we are given musical education; I like to play the piano".

Yasser mentioned the difference between him and his peers by stating: "Yes, they always succeed but I fail. This year I got 70% I like to get excellent which is 90% or very good, which is 80%." He confirmed that he is afraid and nervous of failing. I asked him why and, he said: "I am trying my best, and if I fail this year my father will ground me. I read a lot, and try to answer the questions well during the exam".

An interesting point was also highlighted regarding his transfer to his current school. "This is a school for pupils who do not know how to read and write. That's how I understand it, and that is why I am here. I came here because I have a learning difficulty, I can't read and write well and also I used to fail in the last years, as I told you".

Yasser also suffers from a lack of concentration and is easily distracted, according to his mother's statement:

He forgets things and he moves around a lot; he doesn't sit for long nor rest. He doesn't listen to the teacher; his mind is far away from the teacher talking. He gets distracted easily. He moves a lot when the teacher is talking in the classroom, they call this being "hyper". At the same time, he forgets things. When the teacher asks what something is, he forgets the question. When she asks him to write, he doesn't write and he doesn't read. These are the things which distinguish the dyslexic child, and I found these tendencies in my son (Yasser's Mother's Interview).

This was then confirmed through observation, as the boy showed some hyperactivity and behavioural issues in the lessons observed, but not to a degree that would be abnormal for his age.

I asked him about a situation that I had observed in class between him and his English teacher. Yasser was annoying the child seated next to him and commented on the teacher's t-shirt, which led to him missing out on 10 minutes of his break time.

He said:

I don't like the English teacher; she does not know how to manage the class and she doesn't like me - she hates me, she punishes me with detention, I do not like her. The Arabic teacher is good. She helped me to get good marks and pass my exams. In my previous school, they used to beat us. I was not bad boy but when they gave me a slap I became a troublemaker and tried to annoy them (Yasser).

As a standard procedure, the teacher usually tries to catch his attention and asks him to concentrate on her. This is repeated every five minutes.

In social terms, Yasser is a very sociable child who is loved by his friends. It is important to mention that his mother considered this as an improvement, which was seen after Yasser's transfer to the Model school. Regarding this, she said:

I find him to be another person. In the past he was afraid, filled with fear or apprehension and expressing shyness. But now he has changed, you find him more mature. He is now a sociable person, because the school treated him with dignity and everything. The teacher speaks to him with kindness (Yasser's Mother's Interview).

I asked his mother about the support provided for parents at the Model schools. She responded:

When the school started, somebody came to us from the CCET. He explained to us the meaning of learning difficulties, i.e. that it is not that the child is stupid or lazy, but he or she may be clever and have other good qualities. He also explained more about these difficulties, and about weaknesses built-up over time in the educational programme. It is just that the child forgets. So then we understood more about dyslexia. After we learned about dyslexia we began to treat our child accordingly, which is different from the past. We also learnt how to treat our children from the school and we tried to do the same as the teachers do (Yasser's Mother's Interview).

I asked about the relationship between the school and parents in general and about students' progress. Yasser's mother described the school's practice as admirable: "Actually, they are all my friends, even the headteacher. I provide them with anything they want if they need volunteers or anything else." She went on to add that "I consider myself to be a member of the school staff. I always attend all the workshops, seminars and training sessions organised by the school".

Yasser's mother was satisfied with the support provided, stating "I am satisfied and they have no issues with providing good materials for our children". When she was asked about what the school offered for the parents, she replied: "Everything, and they said to me, do this and do that. Plus, they showed us the way we should behave with our children or treat them and now we are doing that at home".

These views reflect a separate element of support, that which is provided to the parents, and while this could be classified as a form of support for the children, it is not direct, in-classroom educational support. Teachers mentioned that during exams the teachers read out the instructions and all the questions. Then, if the students asked her for explanation or sometimes a re-reading of the question, then she re-read each question individually and gave the students time to answer it. The 'help' from his teacher in the exams was described by Yasser as: "My class teacher helps me in the exams and she warns me when I make mistakes". This kind of 'help', where hints were given, was accepted by teachers and students themselves as a way to avoid failing. During the lesson I did not see any extra support, but when I asked the teacher about that, she mentioned that each child gets one-on-one classes in Arabic, Mathematics and English. This is one of the means of support that Yasser's mother

had described as “improvement classes”. Yasser’s mother advised other parents who had children like Yasser to get them diagnosed without hesitation. She said:

These are learning difficulties and to anyone who has children with these problems I say, “Why do you hide away? This is not to your child’s benefit”. I would ask the parents to diagnose their children. And bring them to this school, because at this school, they would look after the child in many different ways, such as psychologically, educationally and by making him stronger in his studies (Yasser’s Mother’s Interview).

Despite his positive experience in the Model school, Yasser mentioned some difficulties he faced within his classroom experience. In order to explore Yasser’s perspective, he was asked about some aspects that might be an issue for a child with dyslexia, for example, reading. Yasser said he “knew a trick” so he told me about what he would do:

The teacher chooses herself but we know what she is doing. [The trick is], if I do not raise my hand she will ask me to answer and if I raise my hand she won’t. She selects those who do not like to participate and the pupils who feel shy when reading in front of other people (Yasser).

An alternative issue addressed was writing on the board. Yasser pinpointed the problem as him being a slow writer, as well as the shortage of time given to complete the work: “If I can’t complete it in class I do it during the break, because time is short, and I can’t finish everything. The problem is, my writing is slow”.

Moreover, Yasser highlighted other issues related to writing on the board, which included: “This is something I often want to mention. Did you notice how the board was filled with words, and did you see the problem? She counts from 1 to 10, and then she wipes everything from the board so we do not have time to write everything.”

Through observation it was noted that the teacher did not allow enough time for the children to copy from the board. She did not give them a paper copy of what was on the board; instead, she asked them to copy from their classmates after the lesson. The writing was clear and tidy, however, and the only obstacle for the children seemed to be a time constraint.

I observed Yasser in two classes: Arabic and English. In both, he was confident, expressing his ideas and asking questions. He displayed inappropriate behaviour in both periods by chatting and trying to annoy his peers, which led to him being told off a few times and ultimately, he ended up having to stay in class for an extra 10 minutes at break time. In Arabic class, he was fully engaged, perhaps because, as he said, he likes his teacher. He also seemed confident in answering the teacher's questions. In English, he was struggling to read and spell words in comparison to some of his classmates. The teacher was calling on Yasser many times to pay attention. Yasser was answering and talking with the teacher and his partner in Arabic and the teacher kept reminding him to speak "in English please".

Despite this, he asked for support and help when he needed it. This may explain his response when I asked him about the support he received for his homework. He said:

Yes, my mother used to write the answers to my homework out on a piece of paper, and then ask me to copy it into my notebook. Sometimes she would write it directly into my homework book. My English teacher once noticed that, and she became angry and said to me "I always give you merit and encourage you, I want to see your work not anyone else's". I do the homework myself now. I do ask her if I don't know how to answer which she told me to do (Yasser).

After English class finished, I asked this teacher about Yasser's behaviour in class. She said that Yasser tended to act/behave better than he had when he was under

observation, in which perhaps he was trying to show off or seek my attention, which was of course ignored, but the behaviour persisted. Both his Arabic and English teachers remarked that he was progressing quicker than he was at the beginning of this academic year and he would do better if he settled down and tried to concentrate on the lesson rather than distracting other students. They also mentioned that he was sometimes careless and often forgot his homework.

I asked Yasser's mother for her thoughts about implementing full inclusion in Kuwaiti schools. She doubted that inclusion of children with dyslexia or learning difficulties in mainstream schools would work. Expressing this scepticism, she stated: "Do you mean where they mix the normal students with those with learning difficulties? The answer is no. This process doesn't work; the two groups of children are different. One of them has different needs to the other. I doubt that such a project works".

I tried to take this point further in order to explore the trend toward increasing inclusive education from her point view: "I wish that they would increase the number of Model schools like this one for secondary and high school students. I will definitely choose Model schools as they have proved their success, and I as a parent admit it" Yasser's mother raised doubts about the curriculum's suitability if and when inclusive education was to be adopted: "I don't know. I do not believe it works. The failure rate will increase year by year. It will only succeed if they reduce the curriculum material and set suitable exams for those who are in need."

Finally, this mother emphasised the school's effort in responding to her son's needs, and her satisfaction with the support provided to help Yasser overcome his difficulties. Yasser did, however, ask for better treatment from the teachers. "To stop

beating us and not to get angry too much”. This contradicts his earlier statement in which he said teachers did not do so in Model schools, which was a source of confusion. This could be due to him talking about his general educational experience. The possibility exists that corporal punishment was indeed used in the Model school, but of course this was not observed, as the teacher’s conduct would have been different in the presence of a researcher.

4.3.9 Section summary

In presenting this theme, the focus has been on understanding the practices adopted by staff of inclusive and Model schools. The differences between practices in the two types of schools can be attributed largely to differences in staff training, awareness, school resources and various other factors. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties facing teachers within inclusive schools, and there is no reason to believe that they are any less capable of providing an environment conducive to learning for dyslexic children, provided that gaps in funding and training between Model and inclusive schools are closed or at least narrowed. As discussed in the previous theme; the way dyslexia is presented or understood shaped the teacher's practice. Inclusive school teachers generally lacked confidence in their ability to identify children with dyslexia, but were fairly confident of their ability to flag general difficulties for further investigation. They may be hesitant to do so, however, due to parental opposition, which largely stems from societal stigma around perceived disabilities. Teachers saw the solution to children’s difficulty as being a transfer to Model schools, rather than support in an inclusive school. Thus they generally saw their role as being limited to flagging the problem to school administration, after

which the child would be transferred to a Model school if identified as having learning difficulties.

In terms of the support provided for children with dyslexia and learning difficulties, inclusive schools had inadequate environments leading to passive learners. This kind of environment hinders the accommodation of children with dyslexia, and creates barriers to them reaching their full potential. In Model schools, the classrooms were well equipped to facilitate the learning of all children, including children with dyslexia, and teachers had better awareness of the children's specific needs.

The perceptions of inclusion expressed by participants in this study varied from uncertainty and encouragement of inclusion by location only, i.e. separating these children into special classes, as well as full inclusion, which would preclude any limitations in the mainstream educational system. Exploring the issue within the inclusive school context, however, indicated different issues from those in Model schools. Exploring the concept of inclusion, participants had different understandings of what was meant by the term. Teachers from both schools agreed that a main purpose of inclusion was socialisation and combatting stigma, in addition to academic benefits. The participants, however, set limits to inclusion based on the school's perceived ability to meet the needs of children with a learning difficulty and dyslexia within the current context, as well as the availability of support provided by specialised Model schools. Teachers in both schools pinpointed the challenges they were facing in accommodating and including children with dyslexia in mainstream schools. These included insufficient training and an inability to deal with cases that

they perceived as more severe. Most of teachers in the inclusive schools showed negative attitudes towards inclusion and had low expectations of children with dyslexia, while Model school teachers showed more understanding and accepting attitudes towards the concept.

Findings in both cases showed some commonalities and some differences. The same experiences within mainstream schools confirmed and augmented the evidence of the barriers within these schools in regards to meeting the needs of children with dyslexia and learning difficulties. These experiences shed light on the tension between the social model through which parents perceive the condition and the medical model adopted by schools and the education authorities. The cases, moreover, show differences in the experiences between inclusive and Model schools, confirming the advantages and disadvantages of each environment. Parents in inclusive schools were not satisfied by the support provided to their children, however their attitude towards inclusion of children with dyslexia was mainly positive, since the main aim was to avoid stigma and to secure a better education for their children. On the other hand, parents from both schools doubted the practicality of creating inclusive schools within the current provision. Parents of children in the Model school were also content with the support provided and the progress achieved by the child. Parents who had experienced both systems compared their child's experience in the Model school favourably with that of the inclusive and previous school.

| Theme | Inclusive Schools | Model school |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding the practice | RQ2: How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included? | |
| Identification | Teachers' views regarding their ability to identify dyslexia varied. The process starts when the child struggles/ fails 2 years By school psychologist and CCET through the school. By KDA through parents. IQ score in test is 85 and above Parents refused assessment /transfer to Model school to avoid stigma. The child will be advised to transfer to a Model school. Some teachers considered this the end point of their role. | Model school teachers are not tasked with identification, as all the students that enter the school have already been diagnosed with a learning difficulty, usually by CCET Teacher carry out tests to measure the student's skills and difficulty |
| Supporting children with dyslexia | Teachers agreed that the curriculum was inappropriate for children with dyslexia At the beginning of the academic year some tests were applied to identify if the child had any difficulty or weakness. Lesson planning varied according to the education supervisors. | Adapted curriculum (delete lessons) according to the students' ability. One to one classes, each lesson to be delivered according to the child's individual needs Lesson planning included some details regarding the adjustment of the lesson to meet the needs of all the students |
| Inclusion of children with dyslexia/learning difficulty | Purpose of inclusion is to 'normalise' and to 'socialise' children with LD. Confusion about the definition of inclusion leads to very different interpretations. Contradictory perceptions of inclusion and its provision. Inclusion is possible under special conditions and provisions. Inclusive schools do not meet the needs for children with dyslexia. It is better to the child to be transferred to 'specialised' Model schools. | Purpose of inclusion, according to the policy: to achieve educational and social potential, as well as avoiding stigma and not feeling different.. Contradictory perceptions of inclusion and its provisions. Inclusion is possible once a child's difficulty has been alleviated. Children benefited more from the Model school environment than the inclusive one. |

Table 10: Understanding the practices in inclusive and Model schools

4.4 Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia in primary schools in Kuwait

The findings of the current study demonstrated some daily challenges in accommodating and supporting children with dyslexia in mainstream schools. The findings highlight a tension in the schools between providing sufficient support and maintaining the child's place at the school, the latter being difficult without success

in the former. The challenges faced by the inclusive schools will be presented first and followed by the Model school's challenge to get a holistic picture for each type of school. The table below shows the themes related to daily challenges for Model and inclusive schools:

| Theme | Subtheme | Second level Codes |
|--|---|--|
| Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia in Inclusive Schools | Challenges related to the national education system | Policy Budget |
| | Challenges Related to Teachers | Workload Training and preparing teachers Extent of comprehensive understanding of dyslexia |
| | Structural challenges related to the schools | Availability of learning materials Lack of personnel support within the classroom Changing the classroom approach Parental involvement |
| Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia in Model schools | Challenges related to the national education system | Policy Budget |
| | Challenges related to teachers | Training and preparing teachers Extent of comprehensive understanding of dyslexia |
| | Structural challenges related to the school's management | Availability of the learning materials Lack of personnel support within the classroom Parental involvement |

Table 11: The 3rd theme: Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia

4.4.1 Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia in inclusive schools

During interviews, substantial information and insights were gained from school staff regarding the challenges that they faced. This section addresses the challenges in crossing the barrier to including children with dyslexia in mainstream classes. The findings reveal that implementing changes in schools may be a first step in accommodating children with dyslexia in mainstream schools.

Interviewees held different views about the potential for children with dyslexia/learning difficulties being taught in mainstream classes. In their statements, the school staff made it clear that the severity of the learning difficulty was fundamental in determining the ability of a mainstream school to include a certain child. As expressed by the English teacher: “If the case were severe, then they should be transferred to special schools where the number of students is less and the syllabus has been simplified. This would also allow the student to get what they deserve in terms of care without affecting the rest of the class.” (MD-I-ET Interview)

In the previous extract, the teacher highlighted that the provisions being made in the mainstream school are not ‘deserved’ by students with learning difficulties and that their presence may affect the rest of the class. This assumption coincided with the belief that transferring the children to special schools was a solution. Both of these assumptions display the perceived impossibility of a more inclusive approach by the teachers.

In addition, the provision in Model schools influenced the teacher’s sense of responsibility towards students with learning difficulties. A headteacher at one of the inclusive schools said in this regard: “Children with learning difficulties have to go; they have to leave this school to attend their special or Model ones. Our budget is only enough to support a limited number [of students]” (Z-I- HT Interview).

This raises the significant point that children with learning difficulties used to be included in the mainstream classroom before the concept of Model schools became familiar to society. The objective of Model schools is to set an example of ‘good practice’ for other mainstream schools to effectively accommodate children with

learning difficulties and to help the children cope with the mainstream curriculum and education system. In reality, however, teachers hold negative views on including children with learning difficulties. This is worth being highlighted for deeper investigation.

Challenges related to the national education system in Kuwait

Policy

The challenge within the schools starts at the policy level, with many teachers in the inclusive schools appearing to be unaware of the existence of a policy. As mentioned earlier, it was interesting that the analysis of interviewee's responses showed that not a single staff member participating in the research mentioned any national or school policy related to SEN, inclusion or learning difficulty, thus further displaying this lack of awareness.

This lack of policy in the inclusive schools seems to affect the support provided for children with dyslexia/learning difficulties within the school. A deputy headteacher's response regarding current trends in Kuwaiti policy was: "We do not have a written policy regarding this, and this is the fault of the Ministry of Education. We do not have these kinds of documents, but they would be useful, as they would define the method that the school would operate by" (Q-I-DHT Interview).

All the staff noted that there is no policy taking into account the presence of children with dyslexia or learning difficulties in mainstream classes, which made it hard for these schools to meet these students' needs. The school staff, however, specifically the headteacher in this case, stated that there is a general policy used for all children enrolled in the school: "To be clear, there is no policy that is clearly written down.

However, it can be seen more as what we offer as a school to help children with special needs or those who have difficulties” (Kh-I-HT Interview).

This is informative, as it demonstrates that schools create their own, improvised coping strategies in the absence of clear governmental directives, as government policy documents tend to be vague or do not exist at all.

Budget

The school’s budget forms a challenge for inclusive schools which engage in inclusion of children with dyslexia. These challenges are classified according to the levels at which they are encountered; starting in the classroom and then looked at on a wider school level. Of the interviewees, headteachers were the most concerned when it came to highlighting issues of the school budget.

The school budget is not enough to cover the requirements of the students with learning difficulties when they are included and aiming for satisfy their needs. On the other hand, the headteacher does not have the authority to accept any donation from parents or any other institution. Therefore, we ask for full power to be given for the headteacher to deal with such issues (KH-I-HT interview).

Another headteacher highlighted: “We need support, and if we accept any support from external organisations then we could be summoned for questioning” (MD-I-HT Interview).

For some inclusive schools there was a separate budget provided by the Ministry of Education if they included some types of SEN, for example, ‘slow learning’ as was the case for one of the schools in this study. This does not apply for children with learning difficulties, however, except for a limited number as the headteacher stated:

As far as dyslexic children or those with LDs are concerned, they do not provide support tools or materials; there isn’t even a provision in the budget for this group, which is different for the slow learning pupils, who have extra funds

allocated for them. This is not the same budget as the general school budget. Dyslexic children are not given extra monetary provisions at all. This absence of funding could be partly due to the expectation that children with learning difficulties have transferred to Model schools, thus eliminating the need for budgetary provisions for them within a mainstream school. Our budget is enough to support only a limited number of students. Also there are some donations from parents (Z-I-HT Interview).

The existence of the Model schools hence creates a dependency of sorts for inclusive schools. If students cannot cope in the insufficiently supportive inclusive schools, they are simply sent to a Model school, thus the onus to improve practice is on the Model schools.

Regarding the donation of funds by parents, this was not a consistent or even commonly observed phenomenon in all the schools. In most cases, a parent would only donate if they had a child with learning difficulty or any type of SEN at the same school.

Challenges relating to teachers

Workload

The staff expressed challenges faced by the class teacher in finding time to support children with learning difficulties who were included in mainstream classes. The shortage of time relating to the teacher's pre-existing workload was the major point most of the participants mentioned. One headteacher gave an example regarding the workload by mentioning the quantity of the lessons that the teacher is asked to cover in the curriculum. She described it as a real challenge for students with 'learning difficulties'. This highlighted the inability of the teachers to adapt the curriculum in order to make it more accessible for children with learning difficulties/dyslexia:

The teacher has to cover the whole curriculum according to a time scale. With her heavy workload, she will not be able to meet the needs of a child with dyslexia or any other type of learning difficulties in the way they need. That's why Model schools are more accommodating for children with learning difficulties. We still face the issue of the lack of flexibility given to the teacher in adapting the curriculum (JK-M-HT Interview).

This view demonstrates that even teachers at Model schools are only given the flexibility to provide additional support, rather than make adjustments in the nature or the volume of the curriculum itself. A teacher from a Model school compared her current experience to her previous work in inclusive schools when she was asked about including children with dyslexia in mainstream classrooms:

I couldn't devote enough time to looking after them because of the large number of students in class. When you have 25 students, you have to use your time to cover the curriculum for all of these students. Even if you try to help them, you can't give them the sufficient time or attention they really need. In the past, we didn't know that there were children affected by such circumstances, but now I see that when they are in these schools, their special requirements can be catered for (S-M-ET-Interview).

A key difference between the inclusive and Model schools is indeed the provision of individual support, which is only made possible due to smaller class sizes. Perhaps a key issue at the inclusive schools is then class size, which could be more quickly addressed than a lack of expertise. Ali's mother supported this view, as she works as a teacher in one of the inclusive schools but also has a child in a Model school, by stating:

Ali changed my attitude as a teacher, he used to tell me that his teacher does not give him a chance to think of the question, and that he needed some time to think. To be honest I know that this is not possible for a mainstream teacher, because of the large number of lessons she has to cover in the curriculum (S-M-Ali's Mother Interview).

All the participants agreed that large class sizes were a major obstacle to including children with dyslexia in inclusive classes:

With the current number of children in class and the number of children suffering from learning difficulties, it would be difficult for a student who has learning difficulties. Such a student requires more time, concentration and effort. We try as much as we can to provide support for these students, but we are not the same as the specialist schools (MD-I- HT Interview).

An English teacher supported this view and stated:

I have 24 students and if I focused on the weaker ones, it would have an effect on the high achievers, and vice-versa. I believe striking the right balance is difficult. Perhaps if the teachers had some assistance, then the situation would be better (Q-i-ET Interview)

One of the Arabic teachers stated that in order to attain better results and meet the needs of children with learning difficulties: “We need to reduce the number of students [per class] to help teachers relax and to reduce their burdens so that they can deliver better results” (MD-I-AT Interview).

Overall, the clear obstacles that emerged from the data were the large quantity of curriculum material and large class sizes., These two issues, in turn, hinder the ability of teachers to devote time and attention to students with learning difficulties, making their accommodation in the inclusive system flawed by design.

Training and preparing teachers

Teachers highlighted the value of training in enabling them to accommodate children with learning difficulties. The interview data revealed that the lack of training and qualifications in SEN/ learning difficulties teaching was a major challenge. When their school joins the inclusive programme, teachers can join a course that lasts one month provided by the Ministry of Education.

As stated by a school headteacher: “We need courses that teach us how to deal with them, and how to diagnose them. Why are these courses restricted to those teachers who desire to teach in specialist schools?” (MD-I-HT Interview)

A school psychologist stressed the need for training courses that would enable her to attend to the needs of children with learning difficulties: “Keeping children with learning difficulties in their schools will not help them. The teachers are not trained for dealing with these students” (MD-I-Psychologist Interview).

Additionally, it was suggested by another teacher that to develop the school’s practice they need to have specialised teachers as well as to be provided with support materials:

To employ teachers that are able to deal with children with learning difficulties and to provide the relevant educational tools. Also, the number of students is more than the teacher can adequately care for, particularly within this category [of dyslexic students], and teachers should be trained to teach them (MD-I-ET Interview).

Moreover, an English teacher stated the need for “different support equipment, tools and a special teacher for [the students], who has the skills and ability to deal with them. The teacher will have attended many training courses on how to deal with and teach them. The students need great patience from that teacher” (Z-I-ET Interview).

Extent of comprehensive understanding of dyslexia

The study participants highlighted the lack of awareness of dyslexia and learning difficulties as a barrier for developing the current practice. This issue with awareness is multi-faceted and manifests itself in a range of domains, be it on the societal level, within the school environment, or even with a family unit. Perhaps most critically, if teachers are not aware of the implications of the difficulties and how to tackle them,

then there can be no serious attempt to alleviate these students' difficulties. This wide ranging lack of understanding calls for an entirely new and comprehensive approach to raising awareness, with ways to achieve this being discussed by participants, as an English teacher pointed out:

Also, there would be no results if the teacher does not understand how to deal with such students. As such, I hope that there will be more awareness raised within the Ministry [of Education] and other institutions. The barriers that would prevent this from happening are found in the absence of understanding of these types [of students], whether this misunderstanding occurs at home, from the teachers or society as a whole (Kh-I-ET Interview).

Another teacher supported this argument by saying: "In terms of hindrances, I do not believe that there are any, but there is a lack of awareness that will greatly affect any development." (MD-I-ET Interview)

A deputy head of an inclusive school admitted her lack of knowledge about dyslexia and learning difficulties: "I feel bad that I do not know enough about reading difficulties. After talking with you, I have realised that we need a working plan for teachers and management and not just one lecture" (Q-I-DH Interview).

Structural challenges related to the school

A psychologist indicated that it was the school's limited preparation and planning that restricted the potential of including other children, such as those with 'learning difficulties'. This was discussed by a headteacher: "The challenges are poor planning, no setting of targets, and a management that does not really care for these students apart from using them to improve their reputation and to become well-known" (MD-I-Psychologist Interview).

Supporting the previous extract, a deputy head highlighted:

Right now, everything that is done is acted out like a show and the work that is conducted is not honest work. If it was, we would have accomplished something by now. We need a time period of about 5 years in order to educate Kuwaiti

schools and parents about what learning difficulties are and how we can diagnose these conditions whilst also preparing teachers for dealing with these students so that we can be fully prepared (Q-I-DH Interview).

The lack of flexibility given to the headteacher was a point that most of the other heads highlighted: “Every time we wish to do something, we need permission, even if it is only a school trip for the students which could easily be done without the permission of the local educational authorities” (MD-I-HT interview).

Availability of learning materials

The participants agreed on the importance of having special support materials for children with dyslexia. Most teachers stated that they offered all the materials needed. An English teacher stated: “Offering the tools is the responsibility of the teacher. There are audio-visual tools that are provided to us, but they are not specifically for these students, but for all students” (MD-I-ET Interview).

Similarly, concerning the availability of resources, an Arabic teacher said: “It is the teacher’s responsibility to provide any material needed. There is nothing special provided for children with LD or dyslexia” (Z-I-AT Interview).

The staff addressed the need for more tools if and when students with dyslexia were included in the mainstream classroom. A school psychologist stated that they had only ‘heard about’ such tools in the courses they attended on learning difficulties. One psychologist said: “We hear about these things in lectures and courses and how helpful they could be in teaching children with learning difficulties. Unfortunately, we have not seen anything of substance on the ground and all the efforts come from the teachers.” (MD-I-Psychologist Interview)

Lack of personnel support within the classroom

Although all the teachers mentioned that teaching assistance does not apply to the Kuwaiti primary system, an English teacher explained the need for extra supporting personnel in the classroom: “I have 24 students and if I focused on weaker students it would have an effect on the high achievers, and vice versa. I believe striking the right balance is difficult. Perhaps if the teachers had some teaching assistance, then the situation would be better” (Q-I-ET Interview). The importance of working with professionals and specially trained teachers was represented in the school policy and mentioned by some teachers. “We need different support equipment, tools and a special teacher for them, who has the skills and ability to deal with them” (Z-I-ET Interview).

Changing the classroom approach

Some teachers indicated that creating an inclusive classroom would require changing the classroom management to cater for the needs of children with dyslexia and other types of learning difficulties. Some teachers, however, stated that they did not need to change their methods or classroom management: “They do not require a different strategy, maybe to reduce the quantity of teaching materials or ease the subject difficulty, but not something completely different” (Kh-I-ET Interview). Some participants mentioned that it was important for the teacher to enjoy her job when working with children who have difficulties. “I like to teach children who have learning difficulties and I feel happy when I see them improving and I am able to see the fruits of my work, more so than with normal students” (Z-I-AT Interview).

One of the interesting points highlighted was that a strategy which can be effective

for children with dyslexia will also benefit the rest of the children: “These methods are suitable for all, even the ones that I use for the weaker students, as it is not restricted to them only. It takes the form of a game and this interests all the students” (Q-I-ET Interview).

This point was supported by a headteacher, who mentioned: “We apply certain points that have been set out by the Centre for the Education and Strengthening of the Child, such as teaching methods and others. This has benefited all of our students” (MD-I-HT Interview).

Moreover, students with dyslexia need the same teaching methods, as indicated by an English teacher: “They need more or less the same, I mean the same curriculum, but reduced teaching materials and with some repetition” (KH-I-ET interview).

Here, the participants are talking about using similar or distinct approaches for children with dyslexia within the mainstream classroom, instead of the suitability of the curriculum. These views show that participants sometimes contradicted their own opinions on meeting the needs of students with dyslexia and in regards to including them in the mainstream schools.

The mainstream schools’ efficacy in accommodating the children’s educational needs within their classes was one of the concerns highlighted by the psychologists: “Academically, I believe that they need greater care, which we cannot provide for them here in mainstream schools” (KH-I-Psychologist Interview).

This view was supported by another psychologist who stated: “No, inclusive schools do not meet the needs of student with dyslexia, not unless there was a singular effort that was undertaken by a specific teacher who really wanted to help these students”

(MD-I-Psychologist Interview).

Parental involvement

Some teachers mentioned the lack of engagement by the parents. The fact that some the parents of dyslexic students who participated in the study did not attend and contribute to the interview may support this assertion. This appears to be an indication of other issues, however, rather than simply a lack of parental involvement. It is believed that parents are not attracted to the idea of being interviewed on the subject of their children's difficulties, perhaps stemming from their wish to avoid an uncomfortable discussion of the subject due to the stigma surrounding it. It would indeed be difficult for a parent to fully express their child's case to the researcher in a society where they are otherwise unaccustomed to discussing such matters openly. "The barriers that would prevent this from happening are found in the absence of understanding of these types [of students], whether this misunderstanding occurs at home, from the teachers or society as a whole" (Kh-I-ET Interview).

This was also the case for children that had been transferred to Model schools, as described by a headteacher of an inclusive school: "especially since the parents who are told that their child needs to be transferred to a school specialising in learning difficulties often don't know what learning difficulty means. They ask the specialist: 'What do you mean my daughter has learning disabilities?'" (Z-I-HT Interview).

A teacher mentioned that some parents do not even attend teacher-parent meetings and that, in their experience, such parents may just visit the school to discuss their child's dropping grade: "No, they visit us only when the daughter's grade starts to

fall; as for responding to our letters, they ignore them. Even our invitations, they do not care about them” (Z-I-HT Interview).

An English teacher said the same in regards to parents’ cooperation: “In many cases, when the parent contacted us, the aim was not to solve his child’s problem but to ask us to help his child by giving him good marks. I do not understand how they can ask for that” (Z-I-ET Interview).

Generalising this issue as one that relates to all parents, however, is unjust. An English teacher detailed: “There are some parents who follow up on their children continuously, even if their children are extremely successful. There are others who unfortunately do not care for a variety of reasons, such as their advanced age or them having many children” (Q-I-ET Interview).

It was important to also ask parents about their views, as the school would naturally present their version of events, and would be keen to not appear as neglectful. Some parents were not satisfied with the support and cooperation from the school, which contradicted the school’s statements. For example, Afnan’s mother said: “I visited them, asking them to pay more attention”. She also stated that school was not cooperating with her to help Afnan overcome her difficulties. The teacher, however, had a different view in regards to Afnan’s situation. All this will be addressed in more details in the analysis of the case.

4.4.2 Daily challenges in accommodating students with dyslexia in Model schools

Challenges relating to the national education system

Policy

Model schools did provide a relevant body of information within their policy documents; however, this process appeared to be unilaterally guided by the Ministry of Education, with interview data exemplifying a lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Model schools.

A headteacher at one of the Model schools stated that this policy was prepared by the Ministry of Education with no contribution from the schools: “All the policy items are documented. The policy was sent to us by the Ministry of Education to be considered and followed. It is now at the consideration stage” (S-M-HT Interview). When the headteacher was asked about the period needed to confirm the policy, she didn’t specify how long this stage might take.

Besides this, a headteacher at another Model school mentioned the same issues regarding policy. She also specified the role of the school:

The Ministry of Education sets the policy for learning difficulties schools. Every school should set their objectives, vision and values. Our values are inspired by the Holy Quran. Our ambition is to help children with learning difficulties achieve success. The challenge is competition with the other Model school. At the end we all have the same target which is helping children in overcoming their difficulties (JK-M-HT Interview)

The headteacher was asked if she could provide a copy of this policy document, to this she responded:

I can’t supply you with a copy of this policy, because I do not have it now. It is written, but has yet to be approved by the Minister of Education. Most of our

policy is similar to the normal primary schools, but here there are few additional things and I have wider authorisation, as well as direct contact with the minister if there are important matters to discuss with him (S-M-HT interview).

Nonetheless, I had some copies of the original policy or what was described as the documents that the school currently adheres to. These documents were the same for both Model schools; the only difference was the layout and the logo of the school in the margins.

It is logical to expect that Model school staff would inform teachers about the school policy. In this regard, one of the headteachers made a statement about the involvement of teachers in the school policy:

The objectives have been provided in the past by the higher committee of the CCET and me, as a headteacher. The teachers were informed and they were involved in the discussion in order to let them know what we are doing and what are we aiming for. We lay out our strategic plans in accordance with these objectives, which allow the teachers and administrators to understand the plan. They didn't get involved in preparing the plan but they were provided with training courses. They then understood the plan and worked according to it. (S-M-HT Interview).

The headteacher at the other Model school shared the same view regarding the role of the teacher and the parents in school policy. She pinpointed the importance of clarifying the policy to every participant in the school environment: "Everyone at this school should have a clear understanding of the policy and the school objectives. This will help them to feel like they belong to this school" (JK-M-HT Interview)

An Arabic teacher said that being informed 'step by step' about the school's policy made the teachers feel involved:

There is a document. The headteacher has provided us with seminars that explain this document, such as its contents and how to practice following the guidance – and we have to follow the exact details of this guidance. There is an annual school plan, so we have to be able to know everything step by step.

There is also analysis of the percentages for each class, measuring the progress made by the students monthly. We usually have discussions with the headteacher about the curve and trends in this data, together with these percentages. In the past, at our previous schools, we didn't have these discussions. They didn't show us things like this. Now we feel that we are part of the educational system/process (S-M AT Interview).

These statements do not reflect the foundational belief of this research, which is that teachers are supposed to have a pivotal and dominant role in the school, rather than simply be informed.

Model schools appeared to indeed serve as a 'model' for teachers at other schools, who expressed certainty that Model schools were already using the policy documents that were absent in their own schools. Displaying this, an inclusive school headteacher referred to the policies of Model schools for learning difficulties and stated that there was no such document in their school:

There are no specific goals or policies for dealing with learning difficulties, but some goals/policies have been set by Model schools for learning difficulties. These are the two schools that specialise in learning difficulties in association with the Ministry of Education and the Centre for the Education and Strengthening of the Child. You can find these policies and goals with them (MD-I-HT Interview).

It is worth mentioning that the school staff shared a common lack of understanding among them regarding school policy. Instead, they pointed out the individual attempts/efforts by each actor in the school system:

As psychologists, we have a plan and policy prepared by ourselves for us to follow. In regards to the school's plan or policy, the school headteacher and the Ministry of Education prepare that. The advantages are that I can see the child has gained a lot from these, and in regards to myself, I have the ability to give a child attention individually, to look after him here in this school, better than he would be cared for in a normal school. Here, the child has his own plan and his file, from which I can monitor his progress (S-M Psychologists Interview).

This description of approaches taken by individuals rather than the school as a whole was also reflected in interviews with teachers, in which they described how psychologists were solely responsible for the diagnosis of a learning condition. This shows shortcomings in cooperation and cohesion within the school system when it comes to dealing with such cases. - There is no collaborative protocol to follow, instead, each staff member performs his or her own role in isolation.

Budget

Although Model schools are considered to be relatively well-funded projects, their headteachers expressed concern regarding the school budget. As stated by a headteacher, “The only obstacle is the problem of finance, as our budget is not sufficient in covering the expenses for support materials and tools. If a larger budget were provided, we could do more for these children” (S-M-HT Interview).

On the other hand, Model school teachers mentioned the availability of funds in the budget to provide the tools they needed. “In our teaching materials we use sand and other tangible objects, and there is a budget to provide the tools we need. There are no teaching assistants, so the teacher has to rely on herself in planning or using the tools.” (JK-M-AT Interview)

Whilst teachers were willing to criticise several aspects of the school, they tended to avoid direct criticism of the school administration, as they may not have wished to create tension between them and their supervisors.

Challenges relating to teachers

Training and preparing teachers

The Model school policy states that one of the school's objectives is "to provide the teachers within the Ministry of Education and social and psychological specialists with training opportunities in the area of learning difficulties" (Policy).

Model school teachers attended a three-month training course before the school term started. An Arabic teacher at one of the Model schools explained: "Three months before the students' arrival, we received rigorous training at the school. We learned about all the related materials. Then I was able to answer any related questions when asked about learning difficulties" (S-M-AT Interview).

An interesting point highlighted by one Arabic teacher is that the training they received was sufficient and they did not need any more courses: "We don't need more training than the courses already given to us. We can be creative and I find them sufficient" (JK-M- AT Interview).

Other teachers emphasised the efficacy of the staff. Confirming the criteria used for selecting teachers to join this new experimental system, an English teacher explained: "First, the local authority, in cooperation with the CCET, selected us on the basis that we were teachers of distinction at our previous schools" (S-M- ET Interview).

Another teacher detailed: "We have been selected by the local authority in cooperation with the CCET centre for being the best teachers in our specialised areas. We have been rewarded as distinguished teachers for more than three years

in a row. Intensive training provided by CCET centre before the first day of the term followed this” (JK-M-ET Interview).

Extent of comprehensive understanding of dyslexia/learning difficulties (Raising awareness of learning difficulty/dyslexia)

Despite the aforementioned lack of consistent understanding of dyslexia seen at both Model and inclusive schools, training for Model school teachers assisted in providing better support for children with learning difficulties. Nevertheless, there remain many voices calling for improved awareness of learning difficulties/ dyslexia by Model school staff.

One of the stated objectives of Model schools is to raise awareness of learning difficulties across schools in the same local authority, as stated in the policy/objectives documents: “To raise awareness about learning difficulties in the schools of the educational district”.

This policy does not detail how this might be achieved, and the study participants themselves contributed some solutions for raising awareness. The media’s role and collaboration with institutions in this task was discussed by a psychologist:

Support can be provided by the media and government to let people know about dyslexia and to accept the concept, also to let each person know about it, rather than seeing it as something difficult to treat – to show that it is possible to differentiate between slowness and difficulties or mental discomfort (S-M-Psychologist Interview).

While this would be a prudent approach in principle, it requires cooperation from higher levels of government, which has been slow to emerge thus far. Participants did not provide any suggestions as to how awareness could be spread on an individual or grassroots level.

Structural challenges related to the school

The lack flexibility given to the headteacher was highlighted also in Model schools. This was described as: “Every time we wish to do something, we need permission even if it’s only a school trip for the students which could easily be done without the permission of the local educational authorities” (MD-HT).

This lack of flexibility, even in perfunctory matters, translates to a wider lack of manoeuvrability within education and curriculum planning, as highlighted in other sections of this chapter. As such, autonomous efforts that do not rely on government authorisation or support are hindered not only at the teacher level, but at the headteacher level as well.

Availability of learning materials

Teachers mentioned that the resources and materials used to support them in accommodating children with dyslexia/learning difficulties in their classrooms were available. These materials, alongside appropriate training, are key tools in shaping the child’s learning experience and their importance cannot be overstated. One headteacher mentioned:

The teachers and technical instructors provided the materials and tools suitable to meeting the requirements of pupils with learning difficulties. We asked for teaching materials from Egypt and Syria, and then modified them according to the requirements of our children after we received them (S-M-HT interview).

An Arabic teacher mentioned that the availability of the materials was not the challenge for her, rather the absence of an assistant to aid in their implementation “We rely on sand and other tangible objects, and there is a budget to provide the tools we need. There are no teaching assistants, so the teacher has to rely on herself in planning or using the tools” (JK-M-AT interview).

Another Arabic teacher held a different view:

When we were selected to teach children with learning difficulties, they told us that they were going to provide equipment, support facilities and teaching packages for us. When we came in, we established this school ourselves (S-M-AT interview).

Lack of personnel support within the classroom

Despite the connection between the availability of the materials and human resources, it was decided that they would be separated in order to gain clarity. A teacher participating in the interviews combined the need of materials with the need for having a specialised teacher or even a teaching assistant, for example, an English teacher stated: “we need different support equipment, tools and a special teacher for them, who has the skills and ability to deal with them” (Z-I-ET Interview). Having a teacher who specialises in learning difficulties is contradicted in the policy documents of one of the Model schools, which describes an objective as: “To train specialists to be able to identify learning difficulties and deal with them” (Policy/Objectives). The school policy also stated that one of their objectives was to provide children with ‘learning difficulties’ with a ‘specialised’ education:

To provide an opportunity for those suffering from learning difficulties to receive the specialised education they need in order to address the specific aspects of weakness they have, while continuing to study within the school’s curriculum (Policy/Objectives).

The participants agreed on the value of having more support from a specialised teacher when including students with dyslexia/learning difficulties. The results showed that these teachers saw the importance of working with professionals, such as a teaching assistant (TA) and a specially trained teacher.

Parental involvement

The Model school's objectives highlighted the school's role in preparing parents to help their children after being diagnosed as having 'learning difficulties'. To achieve this, they seek: "to provide parents with training opportunities, so that they are able to identify learning difficulties and ways of dealing with them, thus becoming able to help their children in a caring home environment" (Policy).

Some teachers at the Model school described their relationship with parents as 'positive'. In the words of an Arabic teacher, it was:

Very good, but some are not cooperative. Some parents think that it is not their responsibility now, it is the school's. Very few care; some do not know which classes their children are in. They do not come to school to ask about their children's achievements or progress (S-M-AT Interview).

It was important to also ask parents for their perspective on the matter. In contradiction to the statements of the teacher, some parents were satisfied and happy with the support and cooperation from the school. For example, Ali's mother stated:

There is good cooperation between me and his teachers. I was given instructions on how to support Ali at home, for example, his English teacher told me that his improvement was a bit slow and I need to review the phonics everyday with him. The Arabic teacher gave me a plan to follow in order to enhance his reading. That plan is copying out the letters every day, as well as giving him a paragraph to read. Regarding mathematics, I was given some strategies to help him with his time tables but he still needs more practice (S-M-Ali's Mother Interview).

Yasser's mother held a similar view, and appeared to be completely satisfied with the provisions made by the school in terms of support and cooperation, agreeing with the school's account. To this end she said: "All the staff are always in contact with us. I consider myself to be a member of the school staff. I always attend all the

workshops, seminars and training sessions organized by the school” (S-M Yasser’s Mother Interview).

This contradiction in accounts does not necessarily point to a lack of honesty or transparency, but is more likely to stem from the lack of interview data. Also a variation in perspectives is normal and should be expected in qualitative studies. In this study, parents were given the option to participate or not, therefore it can be logically assumed that the most cooperative and involved parents were among those who volunteered. Amongst those who didn’t volunteer were likely to be less obliging and involved in the school environment, and thus Yasser and Ali’s mothers seemed to be amongst the parents whose cooperation was described as “very good”. It is also important to note that parents who had previously enrolled their children at inclusive schools became accustomed to a lower level of parental communication, as outlined in the inclusive school section, and thus the Model school provided a relative, but not necessarily absolute, advantage.

4.4.3. Section summary

In this theme, the focus has been on identifying the challenges in implementing the inclusion of children with dyslexia within mainstream schools. The results showed the complexity of the situation within Kuwaiti schools. The main finding is that the participants justified the specialisation and the exclusion provided by the Model schools, or rather highlighted the challenges faced by the inclusive schools trying to meet the needs of children with dyslexia and learning difficulties. The inclusive school teachers tended to point to resource constraints, which manifested in time constraints, large class sizes, understaffing, poor materials, and a lack of training,

while also citing challenges within the curriculum and poor parental interaction. Model school teachers tended to focus on the lack of awareness surrounding learning difficulties, and had less problems in securing the appropriate resources for teaching. The table below shows some of the challenges in accommodating children with dyslexia in inclusive and Model schools

| Daily challenges accommodating children with dyslexia | Inclusive schools | Model schools |
|---|--|---|
| Related to national educational system | Absence of policy related to dyslexia/learning difficulty. Limited budget . | Lack of understanding among them regarding the school policy from the staff. Concern regarding the school budget |
| Related to the Teachers | Shortage of time relating to the teacher's pre-existing workload Lack of training/qualifications in dyslexia SEN Lack of awareness of dyslexia and learning difficulties | Teachers attended a three-month training course before the school term. Teachers felt that they did not need any more courses. Raising awareness of LD across schools in the same local authority is an objective in the policy. |
| Related to the school | Unavailability of materials, teachers need to offer the materials they need. There is a need for specialised teachers/TA. Current approach/teaching strategy do not meet the needs of children with LD Lack of engagement by the parents. | Availability of the materials was not the challenge; however, teachers occasionally need to source these themselves. There is a need for specialised teachers or even a teaching assistant. Interviewed parents showed interest in cooperating with the school. Teachers mentioned that parental involvement varied. |

Table 12: Daily challenges accommodating children with dyslexia in Model and inclusive schools

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken with the purpose of investigating Kuwaiti participants' understandings and conceptualisation of dyslexia in order to draw conclusions regarding the effects and influences of these on the identification of dyslexia and the support provided to children with the condition. This chapter will highlight the general findings of my study and include interpretation of these findings. These will be further discussed in relation to the Kuwaiti context in which this study was conducted and the existing literature.

The chapter will thus be divided into discussions concerning identification and support, understandings of dyslexia, and the notion of inclusive practice in Kuwait.

5.2 An overview of the significant findings of the study

Before discussing this research, the findings of this study will be summarised in light of the research purpose and questions:

- 1- How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?
- 2- How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included?
- 3- To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools?

First of all, it should be highlighted that although question 3 was not answered in the previous chapter due to the data having shown that participants lacked awareness concerning dyslexia-friendly schools, this chapter will elaborate on the concept of 'inclusion' in terms of its usefulness in the Kuwaiti context. Regarding the concept of 'dyslexia-friendliness' in terms of its usefulness for the Kuwaiti context and the general findings of this study, one of the aims of this research was to shed light on

the conceptualisation of dyslexia in the Kuwaiti education system and the perceptions of the teachers, parents, and dyslexic children regarding the condition. The results concerning the first research question indicated that participants had different personal views of dyslexia and their responses highlighted the complexity surrounding the perception of dyslexia and how the terminology is understood and used in Kuwait. Their responses mainly related to the nature of the difficulty (for example, reading and/or writing difficulties), and tended to be situated within a medical model perspective, for example regarding the problem as being within the child and they frequently stressed the idea that children with dyslexia are 'normal kids'. The term 'learning difficulty' was the most commonly used term; however, the term was not used exclusively for dyslexia and could refer to other learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia, or even slow learning. Some inclusive school teachers were not able to distinguish between learning difficulties and some other types of SEN. Furthermore, the findings highlighted that multiple terms were used for dyslexia itself.

In terms of the second research question, the data showed that inclusive school teachers played a passive role in the process of identification of children with dyslexia; they felt it was the responsibility of other actors within the education system. The findings further revealed that participants had different understandings and interpretations regarding the inclusion of children with dyslexia. Most of the teacher participants agreed that the purpose of inclusion was to provide the same opportunities to children with 'learning difficulties' that their peers enjoyed, in addition to the benefits of social inclusion. Some participants saw inclusion to be important

on a social level rather than academically. Despite recognising its importance, some participants opposed the practice of inclusion. Some of them frankly stated that the schools and the current teachers cannot meet the needs of those children.

In the Kuwaiti context, children with learning difficulties were formerly included in mainstream classrooms before the establishment of Model schools. One of the main objectives of these Model schools was to set 'good practice' for effectively supporting children with learning difficulties. The existence of Model schools, however, seems to have led to inclusive school teachers no longer feeling responsible for children with dyslexia and therefore almost excluding these children from inclusive schools. Furthermore, the findings show that support and resources are provided within the Model schools to children who had been identified and transferred to these schools. Official support, however, for example, materials or programmes, were not provided for students with dyslexia in the inclusive schools. In order to approach children with dyslexia as 'low achieving cases', teachers identified some methods and used them to assist those children. Parents in this study were generally satisfied with the support provided by the Model schools, perceiving them as an improvement from the inclusive schools. On the other hand, one parent whose child was enrolled at an inclusive school reported her dissatisfaction with the support and cooperation provided. These findings were illustrative, however, in revealing some practical challenges at both Model and inclusive schools in accommodating and supporting children with dyslexia.

5.3 System of identification and type of school/support for children with dyslexia/learning difficulties

The identification system and the support provided for children with dyslexia /learning difficulties links to the second research question ‘How are children with dyslexia identified supported and included?’ Early identification and intervention can be an effective method of mitigating the impact of a disability and to bring parents into the process of the child’s development. The literature has been documenting the importance of early identification and intervention for children with dyslexia for many years (Snowling, 2013). Accordingly, the identification of early signs of dyslexia in the preschool years has been addressed in much of the research. As a result, a number of international studies have focused on children at hereditary risk of reading problems e.g. (McBride-Chang et al., 2008).

The findings from the current study show that children with dyslexia are not identified until after they ‘fail’ at school for more than one year. Regarding the Kuwaiti context, this finding displays the limitations that stem from the policy and cultural issues which may negatively impact on the timing of identification. Children thus ‘failed’ for periods spanning over a year before their difficulty was identified. Parents also seem to play a significant role in this regard, as some of them were unwilling to take their children for diagnosis. All student participants in the current study had been given some form of identification, however (most with learning difficulties, two with dyslexia). They had either been identified by their own schools in cooperation with the Center for Child Evaluation & Teaching CCET or via parental intervention through the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA). In the first case (school and CCET) the child will be

identified as having a general 'learning difficulty' while in the second case (parent + KDA) the child will be identified as having 'dyslexia'. Yet these procedures can be considered as being too late for the child, as intervention and support are not always provided at the most appropriate time.

This lack of early identification has far-reaching ramifications later on in the child's progression through the education system, even impacting tertiary education and later careers. This finding is in line with a study by Aboudan (2011) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE); a similar context to Kuwait. This study investigated the prevalence of dyslexia among female students attending a university during the academic year 2007/2008. The study reported that increasing numbers of students with dyslexia are entering higher education institutions and concluded that if those students were identified early, they could be helped to adapt and cope with their difficulties and acquire the skills they need to reach their full potential. Concurrently, many researchers have called for the early identification of children at risk of dyslexia internationally, followed by the implementation of intervention as a realistic aim for practitioners and policy-makers (Snowling, 2013).

The above findings have a number of explanations, which relate to the Kuwaiti culture, lack of knowledge by staff, and the absence of specific policies for dyslexia. First of all, there is a socio-cultural cause for the problem, which relates to parents who had better awareness of the difficulties faced by their children, yet they avoided and even shunned the label of 'learning difficulty'. Some even rejected support or transfers to Model schools to avoid the cultural stigma attached to the concept of disability. In highlighting that cultural beliefs can delay early identification, Brown

(2005) explained that it is preferable for families to only be alerted when the educational difficulty is significantly hindering the child's progress. Indeed, in the Middle East, professionals are hesitant to share their uncertainty about a children's learning difficulty status, so as to avoid insult and preserve the perceived reputation of a family (Brown, 2005).

I would argue that in the Kuwaiti context there is a need for awareness-raising in society regarding the importance of early identification of dyslexia and other learning difficulties in children in order to intervene earlier and provide the needed support at the suitable time. In this respect, I believe that the KDA could have a greater role in raising the awareness of society regarding this and the importance of accepting dyslexia as a difficulty, rather than an issue of shame that people should avoid discussing publicly.

Furthermore, the shortage or even absence of sufficiently knowledgeable staff in the education system is another cause for the problem, which hinders the early identification of learning difficulties generally and dyslexia in particular. This is mainly related to generalist teachers instructing dyslexic students with no training in teaching them. The Ministry of Education in Kuwait expressed the intent to include all children with either 'learning difficulties' or dyslexia in mainstream classes, yet they have not provided any pre-service or in-service training for teachers who are expected to teach those children.

In addition to the above, the absence of a policy relating to dyslexia is another cause for the problem. This means that the Ministry of Education (MoE) and schools in Kuwait lack co-ordination in terms of policy for early identification and intervention.

As is often the case in much of the developing world, the most experienced and well-informed professionals are not those who create policy or make decisions. This is particularly a problem in much of the Gulf, as corruption or nepotism often grants underqualified individuals responsibility for unfamiliar domains. Al-Hilawani et al., (2008) have cited shortcomings in the legal system as the reason for this weakness, as laws are yet to address issues of identification, eligibility, assessment or school placement. Kuwait is not an exception, as the data from this study indicates that there is an absence of policies regarding dyslexia generally and children with dyslexia in particular. The problems with the policy in the Kuwaiti education system were also reported in a previous study done in Kuwait by Aldaihani (2010). She found that “there is no policy to equip schools with professionals to respond to children’s needs” (p. 316). This suggests that the education system in Kuwait works mainly at a national level and does not respond to individual teachers and students’ needs. Much of the education policy is populist, in that it seeks to satisfy the needs of the majority of students over the interests of specific subsets of students. In the case of this study, teachers, parents and children with dyslexia are marginalised in the formation of educational policy. There is a need, therefore, for a representative educational system which empowers teachers, parents and children with dyslexia. This would entail the decentralisation of the education system, leading to some flexibility in being able to respond to the individual needs of those parties and further informing new policies for early identification and intervention of dyslexia. These issues will be further discussed in the next section in relation to the study findings and the literature.

5.3.1 The Kuwaiti identification system

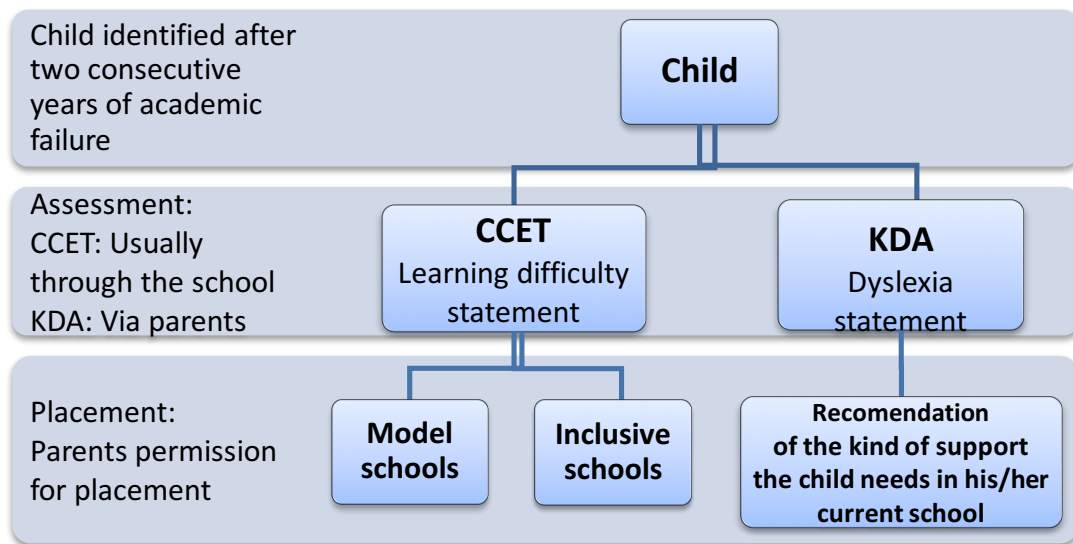


Figure 4: System of identification and type of school/support for children with dyslexia/learning difficulty

As mentioned above, in Kuwait, policies for early identification and intervention are missing; mainstream schools serve as the front line in identifying children who are struggling in their learning. The data from this study has revealed that the identification system in Kuwait has three main stages, as shown in Figure 4. The first stage is characterised by delays in identification, since the child is only identified as a child with dyslexia or a 'learning difficulty' after a year or more of academic failure, as detailed in the previous section 5.3.

The second stage is the assessment of the child. The findings revealed that assessment of the child is carried out through two different institutions, namely CCET and KDA. After his/her two consecutive years of academic failure, the child is referred by his school to the CCET for assessment. Alternatively, the parents themselves seek help if they feel their child is struggling at school. In this case, they refer their child to the KDA for assessment, if they are aware of this relatively low-

profile organisation. The assessments done by both the CCET and the KDA depend on IQ tests as a preliminary diagnostic stage. After the child is diagnosed as a 'learning difficulty case' he/she may either be enrolled in a Model school or stay in his/her current school if he/she scores 85 or above. If the score of the child is between 70 and 84, he/she will then go into a 'slow-learner' inclusion programme. If the child scores between 50 and 70 he/she will be then placed in a special school for so-called 'cognitively impaired' students. As mentioned previously, a student with low achievement is left to constantly fail until he is identified by the school, which then undertakes tests in cooperation with the CCET. This 'cooperation' takes the form of school psychologists administering ready-made IQ tests to children, after which they then refer the case to the CCET or the institutions concerned with slow learning or cognitive disabilities. The child will be provided with a learning difficulty statement as well as being offered a transfer to the Model school for learning difficulties. The school is then obliged to notify parents of their child's difficulty.

While parents were often not accepting of transfers to Model schools, they would attempt to rationalise the child's transfer as a form of labelling in a society which is yet to develop substantial awareness, and blame the school for being unable to accommodate academic weakness. In response, schools were quick to defend their position by citing IQ tests and academic failure as evidence for the necessity of exclusion. This tension can be seen as a telling representation of the contrast between the medical and social models. Schools identify the deficit as an issue within the child, claiming they are not suited for mainstream education. In contrast,

parents are quick to highlight the lack of school support that could have prevented such a failure.

The requirement for immediate solutions stems from a situation in which Kuwaiti educators find they lack awareness and training about special needs. The system thus encourages teachers to delegate the problem to other professionals such as psychologists, or to search for quick solutions. Concurrently, the system encourages teachers to seek tips and advice rather than to gain a deeper understanding. The nature of dyslexia and learning difficulties has been a subject of debate among experts (Tunmer & Greaney, 2010). Yet teachers themselves should be encouraged and permitted to play a role in this dialogue (Carter & Wheldale, 2008). Rose (2009) also recommended that specialist teachers focusing on learning difficulties should be trained for schools dealing with such issues in the classroom.

Many studies have been done worldwide regarding the assessment of children with dyslexia. As an example, a study conducted by Almaazmi (2013) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a neighbouring country to Kuwait, examined a possible framework for intervention and support techniques that addresses the needs of Emirati students with dyslexia. Almaazmi reported that culturally-appropriate assessment methods are essential in the effort to accurately diagnose and support dyslexic individuals. Accurate diagnosis and intervention leads to a more effective outcome in remediation, especially in reading and writing skills. Yet a lack of culturally-appropriate assessment methods, accurate diagnosis, and support can often lead dyslexic individuals to suffer from low self-esteem and motivation (Almaazmi, 2013).

If parents are more accepting of the situation, children are then transferred to Model schools specialising in learning difficulties. Based on the experiences of children with dyslexia and their parents who were included in this study, the current practice in Model schools seems to implement segregation rather than inclusion. Parents and children within the sample preferred Model schools over inclusive ones, however, because there were trained teachers, extensive resources and positive attitudes in the Model schools. Children with learning difficulties are frequently excluded from mainstream schools on the grounds that they benefit greatly from the special provision in the Model schools, in addition to potentially being able to return to their previous schools after they overcome their difficulty. Furthermore, the transfer of children with learning difficulties to the Model schools was associated with teachers expressing the notion that attempting to accommodate these children would be irresponsible.

In the other case where parents seek diagnoses independently if the school has failed to intervene, they resort to the KDA, as the data from this study revealed. The KDA provides a dyslexia statement where appropriate, recommendations for the school to support the child (which was questioned by the teachers, as previously mentioned), and extra-curricular support classes in the areas that the child struggles with. The organization seems to lack the ability to influence, however, which can be attributed to its own shortcomings, but also issues with the perceptions of society. The KDA is a non-government organisation (NGO) with limited resources and plays an advisory role without having any executive power, hence schools are not obliged to implement its recommendations. It should not, therefore, be seen as a substitute

for capable government institutions; rather it may be seen as a stop-gap measure in the absence of sufficient policy and government initiatives. Nevertheless, the CCET has more influence and authority in the field of dyslexia as an NGO that is strongly supported by relevant government bodies, despite the fact that it does not specialise in dyslexia, meaning that further government support for the KDA could improve the situation. It appears that the perceptions of society play a role in the weakness of the KDA – the lack of awareness in society of dyslexia naturally detracts from the relevance of the KDA in comparison to the CCET, but the KDA cannot bear the responsibility of raising awareness alone.

In the Kuwaiti context, there seems to be a lack of cooperation between the different institutions responsible for children with dyslexia such as CCET, the KDA and the MOE. In my view, this has resulted in children being identified and intervention provided too late. This suggests that more cooperation between these three institutions would be beneficial, so efforts could be more focused and the identification and diagnosis procedure could be faster and more efficient. Each institution could be responsible for a specific role in the process, instead of having one unified government institution responsible for the whole process. This may encourage improved accountability, transparency and autonomy. Moreover, preventing the process from becoming monopolised would allow institutions to monitor one another to ensure standards are being upheld. Furthermore, there is a real need for new approaches to the identification and intervention of dyslexic children. As mentioned previously, if teachers are prepared well for this job, they can easily identify the early signs in children with dyslexia. Parents' awareness, as

mentioned above, could also help in this respect, since parents can feel and notice any signs that indicate their child may need extra support. Prior to transferring children from kindergarten to mainstream primary schools in Kuwait, reports should be written about the children addressing any early indications of learning difficulties. Such approaches could be a catalyst for earlier identification and intervention to support and/or accommodate children with dyslexia in mainstream schools.

The third stage of the Kuwaiti identification system as shown by the data (see Figure 4) is the placement of children with dyslexia or 'learning difficulties'. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, schools often seem to solve the problem by attempting to convince parents of the benefits of a transfer to a Model school. One of the key justifications is the idea of specialisation, which dominates the policy, practice, and language at different levels. In these cases, however, the children and the parents have the right to choose a between inclusive and Model schools if they refuse transfer to a Model school. For example, although Abdullah's mother returned her son to the inclusive school after some time in the Model school, she admitted that support at the Model school was superior. She preferred for her son to return to his friends at the inclusive school, however. This is a clear manifestation of the tension between providing better support for the child and avoiding the stigma that could emerge from attending a school designated for learning difficulties. Parents thus find themselves in a dilemma between insufficient provision at the inclusive schools versus the stigma of studying in a specialised school for learning difficulties, which in turn is aggravated by poor societal awareness, as mentioned previously. Mattson and Roll-Pettersson (2007) reported that children with dyslexia felt stigmatised when

leaving the regular classroom to receive special education services. Another study showed, however, that children with dyslexia in mainstream schools were more likely to be bullied and teased than children without dyslexia (Glazzard, 2010). In this study, children from the Model schools generally expressed that they were happier than they had been in their previous schools. This finding corresponded to the findings of Nugent (2007), where parents of children in specialist schools were significantly more likely to report that their children were 'very happy' than parents of children in mainstream schooling.

The experience of Abdullah or the other students in this study should not serve to detract from or support the inclusive model in general, as Feiler and Gibson (1999) state:

...our concern is that because there is no consensus regarding the definition of inclusion, various practices have sprung up that might, on the face of it, appear to be supportive of inclusion. On closer scrutiny, however, they may reveal that a variety of distinctive forms of exclusion are operative in practice. (p. 147)

It would seem that Kuwait needs to dedicate more time and resources to developing an enhanced and consistent Inclusion policy before dismissing the initiative. The choice between segregation and inclusion has been examined by numerous studies. There are valid arguments which highlight some of the advantages and disadvantages for each approach. McLaughlin and Rouse (2000) state that mainstream schools were designed to meet the needs of all students, including students with learning difficulties and other educational difficulties. Nevertheless, there is a belief that "separate education was inherently discriminatory and inequitable" (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Burden, Jones & Heskin, (2010) state that

the attendance of children with dyslexia in a specialist school may be beneficial for the child's emotional experience, self-concept, and self-esteem.

The decision differs from family to family and can depend on numerous factors, such as the family's level of education, or whether the child is more emotionally impacted by the social stigma or academic struggle. School psychologists appeared to believe Model schools were the optimal and therefore the only appropriate learning environment for Abdullah, as is often the case with other children who are identified with learning difficulties. Parents attributed the stigma to a lack of awareness among schools and in society of their children's needs. This situation led them to avoid stigma and protect their children by hiding their difficulty from others. This result is consistent with another study by Wehbi (2006). Wehbi reported some of the findings of the assessment process, through interviews and focus groups, to identify available information, current policies and legislation, main stakeholders and existing programmes of inclusive education in Lebanon. There are some common themes with my study, such as a perceived need for raising awareness on disability issues and a perceived lack of adequate teacher training. Wehbi concluded by arguing for change efforts on various levels to support inclusion: awareness-raising; policy change; capacity-building; and community-building.

Children who remain in inclusive schools must cope within the mainstream educational context. Inclusive school staff point out that they are unable to accommodate such children's needs in several ways. As indicated and acknowledged by the research in this study and the literature, many barriers in Kuwaiti primary mainstream schools impede the inclusion of SEN children (Alseed,

2003). Evidence for this is seen in my findings, in which mainstream schools appeared to accept children with learning difficulties before identification, only to later attempt to transfer them. While schools are obliged to accept all children, in some cases teachers did not complain of the difficulty of teaching such children until the child was identified as having a learning difficulty. This demonstrates an underlying leaning towards a medical model, in that the problem is seen as being inherent in the child and thus beyond the purview of a normal teacher.

If children are to remain in inclusive schools without succumbing to pressures for transfer, children are required to adapt to the dominant school environment without any support, rather than the environment being modified in response to their needs. The lack of understanding among school staff and teachers, as demonstrated in their interpretation of the definition and purpose of inclusion, is one aspect that would affect school practice. It can be argued that lack of understanding leads to a negative attitude to including children with dyslexia/learning difficulties within mainstream schools. Rouse (2009) suggests that inclusion depends on teachers' 'knowing' (about theoretical and policy issues) 'doing' (turning knowledge in to action) and 'believing' (in their capacity to support all children). The findings demonstrate that inclusive schools often appear to perform poorly in accommodating cases of dyslexia/learning difficulties. The views of school staff regarding the challenges to inclusion of children with dyslexia were highlighted in the previous chapter, such as large class sizes, inflexible curriculum, and various other issues.

5.3.2 Teachers' knowledge

Elliott and Grigorenko, (2014) cited a lack of teacher knowledge regarding dyslexia as a factor in insufficient identification, instruction, intervention and accommodation for such students. This was highlighted as a difficulty by several participants in this study.

Inclusive schoolteachers expressed difficulties in distinguishing children with dyslexia from other types of SEN, for example slow learners. Some teachers pinpointed this as being due to the similarity between symptoms, hence they felt that professional examination was the only effective means for diagnosis. A quantitative study by conducted Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012) in Kuwait aimed to assess the knowledge of primary school teachers regarding early detection of the symptoms of dyslexia and their level of awareness of the concept. The study results showed that the majority of teachers lacked training, knowledge, and skills to identify children with dyslexia in their classrooms. The qualitative findings of my study are consistent with these.

Such aspects were analysed by Basu, Poonam and Beniwal (2014) in a study conducted *Delhi region* of 37 teachers who taught children with dyslexia. In assessing the ability of teachers to recognise dyslexic students they found that most of the teachers confused 'slow learners' with actual 'difficulties in learning'. They failed to discuss the concept of dyslexia and instead looked to other challenges to explain students' difficulties.

According to a 2005 study by the Kuwait Dyslexia Association (KDA), 6.3% of primary school students in the country were dyslexic. These statistics are, however,

partially based on observations by teachers, which is concerning as it seems that many teachers are not in a position to identify dyslexic children. It seems that there are significant numbers of children in Kuwaiti primary schools who remain unidentified and receive no additional support. This comes with the assumption that support should be provided individually rather than through fundamental changes in the school environment, as the latter would be far more challenging in terms of resources, policy, capabilities, and societal constraints. Reform to the education system's approach to dyslexia is needed, but even basic changes take far longer than in the UK, due to cultural and political constraints and the unfamiliarity of dyslexia. The provision of individual support can be seen as an initial step towards improving not only the education experience of dyslexic children, but may build awareness of the public and teacher's knowledge to allow for a more conducive environment for deeper reform.

Teachers' knowledge is an essential part of the identification process. The criteria applied to identify children with dyslexia under the discrepancy model means that the child will only be supported when there is a significant disparity between their IQ and their ability to read. For those children who do not exhibit IQ discrepancies, Vail (1990) explains that this could be due to their intelligence obscuring the existence of dyslexia, or vice versa. As Osmond (1993) states, this unrefined identification hence means that potentially high-achieving dyslexic students are merely seen as average students without learning difficulties, which demonstrates the significance of improving teacher awareness. Whilst an extensive body of scientific literature rules against the IQ discrepancy model for diagnosis and intervention, a significant

proportion of teachers and psychology still use such methods (Machek & Nelson, 2007). The model used in Kuwait is even more rudimentary than this, as it does not account for reading level when looking at IQ, further demonstrating the inadequacy of this approach. This is particularly concerning as Catts and Kamhi (1999) point out that average and above intelligence has long been established as a defining characteristic of dyslexia.

As noted earlier, some parents are enthusiastic about obtaining dyslexia statements from the KDA in order to ensure that their child receives support at school. One parent did indeed obtain such a certificate; however, it did not actually assist her child in getting support. Other children experience difficulties but have not been identified or noticed by their class teacher. Some teachers in this study noted that they were unsure of how to identify dyslexia, but that the inclusive schools already provided the necessary support/practice to meet the needs of the majority of the children within the school without additional help or support. Fulfilling the needs of 'most students in the school' may be insufficient, however; Kuwait cannot claim to offer an all-encompassing provision, as achieving such goals would be a lengthy and challenging process in this context. Furthermore, this view suggests that not only are teachers lacking the ability to identify dyslexia cases, they can also be complacent and not see the importance of doing this, as such cases can simply be transferred to Model schools. Florian and Spratt (2013) argue that "all children's capacity to learn can change as a result of decisions and choices made in the present: that teachers can do and make a difference to what and how children learn" (p. 112). This underscores the importance of creating a suitable and effective infrastructure to

encourage inclusive school teachers to play an active role in the identification and support process as part of a longer term overarching reform program, which should first address students' immediate needs for individual dyslexia support and then address wider structural issues within the education system. The transition of reform from merely providing individual support to a more profound change to the system is one that cannot be neglected, even if the immediate needs do begin to be addressed through individual support. The two levels of reform must come as part of a single, broader plan with a phased implementation.

In the aforementioned study by Al-Adwani and Al-Shaye (2012), it was stated that Kuwaiti primary teachers - regardless of their experience, nationality and gender - had very low awareness and training at the individual or institutional level. This study further suggests that they do not have adequate knowledge and training to be able to identify a child with dyslexia or other conditions. Al-Adwani and Al-Shaye (2012) also state that experience had no impact on the teacher's ability to detect dyslexia cases among students. The teachers surveyed in Al-Adwani and Al-Shaye's study suggested that the number of years in experience had a significant correlation with the level of preparedness, knowledge and ability to diagnose dyslexia, however. Such a perception raises questions about the importance of training institutions in building skills among teachers. A study by Papalouka (2011) also supports the findings of this study in the sense that most of the teachers were not adequately prepared to tackle the challenge of dyslexia. The teachers in her study were also ill equipped to define, diagnose and support students with dyslexia, displaying that these issues are not solely related to the development of the education system, as

the UK and Greece have more sophisticated training and practices, but perhaps also the underlying lack of clarity surrounding the definition of dyslexia itself. Misunderstanding, misdiagnosing and even ignoring dyslexic students is a frequent occurrence as their abilities and skills are often not taken into account (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014). Stienberg and Andirson (2012) expressed the importance of teachers' understanding of dyslexic students' abilities and potential when teaching and accommodating them.

5.3.3 Training

As with identification, training also impacts teaching, since many educators are completing their initial training without sufficient skills and knowledge to deal with special needs (Norwich, 1990). In the current study, teachers pointed to a lack of training opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education. In the context of this study, the lack of training is not limited to inclusive school teachers but also extends to psychologists. A clear need emerged for qualified professionals in areas such as dyslexia and learning difficulties in general, as well as other SEN. Gaad and Arif (2008) identified this same need in the UAE, another Gulf state with a similar context to Kuwait.

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers did not have the necessary training for support and accommodation of children with dyslexia in their classes. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) point out that teachers' uncertainty or scepticism towards the usefulness of inclusion can be an issue. This also stems from a lack of training and naturally impacts the quality of teaching.

This study's findings show that many teachers mentioned the need for training that would enable them to deal with children post-diagnosis. Teachers were not asked to prioritise specific needs, but in a Greek study by Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) (where teachers were asked to rank ten methods for improving practice in terms of their usefulness), in-service training and attending courses at the university received the second and third highest ranking respectively. "Direct teaching experience with pupils with SEN", received the highest ranking. Teachers' voices must be heeded when deciding on training priorities; such views are likely to be fairly representative of the wider global situation, including the Kuwaiti context.

A study conducted in Greece by Lemperou et al. (2011) presented the training needs expressed by teachers who are facing the challenge of teaching students with dyslexia in their classrooms. My own findings were consistent with those of Lemperou et al. (2011) which indicated that teachers had limited awareness about dealing with dyslexic students in the classroom. They expressed interest in in-service training in order to become better equipped in their knowledge. Some inclusive schools identified the need for in-service, a need echoed even in countries with more developed dyslexia provision. In reaction to such issues, The *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 in the UK called for highly qualified teachers who are state certified and also possess degrees in their area of instruction (Sipple & Castro, 2010). This shows that improvement of training is still a priority even in countries with more developed dyslexia policies, showing that this may be a complex issue that Kuwait will have to address for many years to come.

Lipsky and Gartner (1998) highlight the importance of organised and targeted human resources development for successful inclusive practice. Various studies (Hodkinson, 2006; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) remark that teachers in mainstream schools tend to be sceptical regarding inclusive education due to insufficient training. Our findings show that teachers lack the skills to accommodate children with SEN, which is consistent with several studies in the literature of both Kuwait and the UK (e.g. Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009; Brown, 2005; Al-muhareb, 2007; Alseed, 2003). In the UK, Hodkinson (2008) concluded that 48% of recently qualified teachers are insufficiently prepared to teach children with SEN. Even without the undertaking of extensive fieldwork, it can be assumed that this figure would be vastly higher in Kuwait, where policy, awareness and training are far less developed than in the UK. When discussing the issue of training, teachers in my study highlighted the importance of training in enabling them to accommodate children with learning difficulties. The finding revealed that the lack of training and qualifications in SEN/ learning difficulties teaching constituted a challenge. There is, therefore, a significant need for better and more intensive training for teachers of children with dyslexia (Nalavany et al., 2011). Sikes et al. (2007) point out that inclusion was considered to be a positive development by teachers, but only when they had appropriate training; this issue was amplified further in Kuwait, where teacher training for special needs remains underdeveloped. According to Mackay (2004), teacher training on dyslexia is one of the criteria for dyslexia-friendly schools. It influences the teaching and assessment of children with dyslexia, provision of support, and encourages teachers to work in partnership with

the parents. Kuwait needs coordinators, management staff and other professionals in areas such as dyslexia. The process of implementing enhanced training is already under way in Kuwait, as authorities recognise the need for specialised training and already provide such options. Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training provide distinct pathways in their teacher training programmes for special and general education, showing a segregated rather than an inclusive pathway.

The findings demonstrated that teachers cited the excessive focus on subject-specific knowledge at the cost of general pedagogical skills, specifically those in relation the accommodation of children with special needs. Issues with training also affect other educational professionals involved in SEN provision, such as psychologists. Kuwait suffers from a shortage of qualified special education professionals, not only in dyslexia but also many other areas of special education. Kuwait is not unique in this respect, as many other Gulf nations with grand ambitions and budget allocations for education often find that infrastructure and skilled labour act as constraints to the achievement of these goals (Gaad & Arif, 2008).

5.4 Understandings of dyslexia: difficulty, disability or a difference?

In order to understand the origins and implications of participant views on dyslexia, the perspectives from which they see it must be understood. The findings initially revealed that there was no clear notion of dyslexia among the study participants in both types of schools (Model and inclusive). The findings showed that the importance of boosting knowledge and awareness regarding dyslexia and learning difficulty was understood, particularly in teaching children with dyslexia post-

diagnosis. The findings also highlighted that participants had a variety of understandings.

Children with dyslexia were not asked for their perception of dyslexia and learning difficulty, as mentioned previously. Some children mentioned 'learning difficulty', however. The interviewees' ideas about 'dyslexia' and 'learning difficulty' reflected their understanding of dyslexia. These will be discussed through categorising the words used by participants when expressing their understanding. These are 'difficulty', 'disability' and 'difference'. The tension between the different understandings of dyslexia has been a subject of debate in the literature, however. Clarity is important, because as Burden (2008) states, labelling a child with dyslexia (if the term is appropriately understood) can help them to develop a more positive view of themselves. Stein (2012) states "Knowing that his dyslexia is a respectable neurological diagnosis, and not another word for laziness or stupidity can transform a child's self-image" (p. 189) This should not, however, contradict with the main goal of labelling, which is that of seeking support for all children that are struggling to learn.

As previously explained, the issue of awareness comes hand in hand with policy. The KDA pointed out that a small minority of Kuwaitis understand the nature of dyslexia and the support required. Their definition is: "Dyslexia is a learning disability that manifests primarily as a difficulty with written language, particularly with reading and spelling" (KDA, 2013) Ott (1997) points to a more nuanced understanding by explaining that dyslexia is a multi-disciplinary domain, as the differences are personal, the diagnosis is clinical, the treatment is educational, and the

understanding is scientific. The KDA or educational authorities in Kuwait do not share this view, as shown by the fact that the identification process is based on a medical model (i.e. the use of IQ testing).

Peer and Reid cite the importance of a consistent definition of dyslexia to ensure that all parties directly engaged with dyslexia, such as parents, teachers, specialists, and researchers, approach the issue from a clear foundation (2003). Inconsistent definitions are problematic due to their influence on identification, support, policy, and practice. They also warn against generalising and misunderstanding definitions:

...it is also important that a definition does not become a generic label open to misinterpretation and abuse. It is therefore important to recognise that a definition of dyslexia should be contextualised for a purpose and context to make it meaningful for a specific educational or work context. A definition should be informative and not merely an extended label. (Peer & Reid, 2003, p.17)

The findings of this study demonstrate that there is a diverse array of definitions and understandings of dyslexia and learning difficulty, for example the CCET did not provide a definition of the term 'dyslexia', as it claims to specialise in learning difficulties in general, with dyslexia being only one aspect of their work. The term 'Specific Learning Difficulties' (SpLD) was employed in presenting the organisation's vision, namely "to empower individuals with specific learning disabilities to achieve their full potential and be included in the society in which they form a part". Furthermore, the term 'learning disabilities' was also used, in the context of "to develop resources that facilitate the identification of individuals with learning disabilities, as well as appropriate intervention for their disabilities"

The KDA defines dyslexia as "a learning disability that manifests primarily as a difficulty with written language, particularly with reading and spelling". Here, the use

of the term is a reflection of a dyslexia-specific understanding. This lack of singular understanding plays a role in the inconsistent approaches by individual teachers, specialists, and parents. One way to address this issue would be providing a unified training course and building awareness, which would be a pre-requisite step to building a more complete understanding of dyslexia, thus allowing educators to play a role in the future formulation of dyslexia-friendly policy.

5.4.1 Is dyslexia a learning difficulty?

Dyslexia was regarded by participants in this study as a learning difficulty, in both Model and inclusive schools, which also reveals a growing adoption of the term 'learning difficulty' throughout the country. So while a singular definition is yet to be used or perhaps understood by all involved parties, the term itself has become widespread. The CCET employs the term 'learning difficulty' when issuing statements to children; however the KDA continues to use the term 'dyslexia'. Yet 'learning difficulty' is also used by the participants and in official documentation in Kuwait as an umbrella term for a range of learning difficulties, of which 'dyslexia' is one variant. Riddick (2010) mentions that in the UK, dyslexia is the main term used, although research or writing sometimes uses other terms such as 'specific learning difficulties' or 'learning disabilities'. Pumfrey and Reason (1991) point out that the term 'learning disabilities' (LD) is used in the USA to refer to problems similar to those described in the UK as 'specific learning difficulties' (SpLD), while the two terms still refer to similar issues in learning.

In Kuwait, a serious debate has yet to emerge regarding the most appropriate terminology. It seemed, however that both teachers and students at the Model

schools in my study also appeared to be aware of, and at ease with, the term and label 'learning difficulties'.

In the current study, students stated that they attended a school known to specialise in learning difficulties. They also attested to having undergone a series of tests related to their status as having learning difficulties. This may encourage them to face their difficulties confidently in an environment that does not single them out as 'underperformers'. It is hence believed that this is a key factor in their notable progress since their transfers to Model schools. While the Model school environment is conducive to the avoidance of individual labelling, grouping children labelled as having 'learning difficulties' may imply that such children have a weaker academic capability than other students, which in some cases may have an adverse effect on long term performance, particularly if children are to be re-integrated into an inclusive system in the future.

The term 'learning difficulty' may be perceived as a way to avoid the 'disabled' label being attached to children by society. Instead, the term may support the notion that learning methods and the support provided needs to change over time, as difficulties can apparently be mitigated, whereas disabilities seem more permanent.

The Arabic use of the term 'dyslexia' ('reading difficulty') reflects a focus on academic performance and attainment. 'Learning difficulties', however, can also be confused as an umbrella term; some inclusive school teachers highlighted the inability to distinguish between "learning difficulties" and other types of SEN. They tended to compare and contrast 'learning difficulty' with 'slow learning', for instance. It appears that teachers perceive weaknesses in this area as being linked to general poor

performance, rather than a specific difficulty. Yet many researchers believe that there is no single answer to this issue, as there is no single definition of dyslexia. A 2009 study into dyslexia identified 28 slightly different definitions of the term (Elliott, 2009), displaying the variety of definitions offered by researchers. The lack of precision in the term's usage may explain the difficulties teachers face in explaining the condition (Snowling, 2005).

The perceptions as to whether or not students perceived they had a 'problem' were mixed in the study, demonstrating a contrast between inclusive and Model schools. All students openly stated that they were having challenges with reading. One student pointed out that teasing singles out intelligence as the root of reading difficulties. This is notable, as it may cause a child to feel that their intelligence is deficient, hence indifference or even cynicism can emerge towards exerting effort in school. Model school children seemed to have a greater awareness of their difficulty in comparison to inclusive school children, which may point to the school environment being clearly set up for children with learning difficulties. This could also stem from the fact that Model schools specialise in learning difficulties and do not distinguish between cases, especially in the first statement/diagnosis provided to the student. This might have an influence on the participants' understanding of the term 'learning difficulty'. It also allows the school to give students collective awareness without needing to detail the specific difficulties of each child, which could lead them to compare themselves to one another. Students blamed themselves for not performing well, even among those who recognised that they have a 'learning difficulty', which is likely to have a negative impact on morale and particularly self-

confidence, which would further hinder the child's expressive capabilities. Inclusive school children highlighted the lack of support provided, which was consistent with the observations and findings from other interviews. This was also supported by students who had recently transferred to Model schools. These children were pleased with the support provided and the progress they had made in comparison with their previous schools, giving some examples of areas in which they struggled or were dissatisfied with.

The use of 'learning difficulties' as an umbrella term encompassing a host of issues presents an obstacle to a more precise and accurate understanding of dyslexia and results in many unrelated issues being conflated with dyslexia.

5.4.2 Is dyslexia a disability?

A definition that outlines the manifestations of dyslexia could perhaps help alleviate some of the misconceptions and confusion surrounding the concept, particularly in countries like Kuwait where established norms are yet to be implemented. The debate about the definition of dyslexia was also evident in the interviews conducted with both the Model and inclusive school teachers in this study. Some participants struggled to produce a definition of dyslexia or express what dyslexia meant to them. Some provisions for dyslexia in Kuwaiti schools are based on a medical model of disability, which views disability as an inherent problem. In Kuwait, disability is perceived as being directly caused by disease, illness or other health conditions, which requires treatment by professionals pursuing a medical explanation in order to cure and resolve the individual's difficulties. This attitude leads educators and

policy makers to distance themselves from pedagogical problems, especially after the establishment of the Model schools.

The medical model can be examined in order to understand the basis of common beliefs in Kuwait. Dyslexia was first identified and explained by medical professionals; however, a wealth of research surrounding the causes of dyslexia has subsequently emerged from a medical perspective (Fawcett & Nicholson, 2005). It was educators who provided the answers to many questions, however, emphasising the importance of the learning processes and its development (Doyle, 2002). It is therefore erroneous for Kuwaiti educators to look towards the medical model for explanations and justifications – while much can be said for the inherent factors that lie at the root of the condition, its management requires a diverse and multi-faceted process. In terms of assessment and subsequent support, educational rather than medical professionals should arguably play the leading role.

Dyslexia was defined as an ‘illness’ by some of the inclusive school staff. This type of language shows the medical model’s dominance in their perceptions and locates the problem within the child. Policies are an important source of understanding for the concept of dyslexia within the Kuwaiti context, particularly at Model schools. In these documents, learning difficulties were described as ‘personal disorders’, again limiting the problem to the child and indicating that it is inherent and outside of the norm. Such perceptions are initiated at a policy level; even if inclusive schools do not have such written material, they draw their understanding of dyslexia from the Ministry of Education. This issue with policy is then transferred to the child, either through the school or through their parents.

While the perceptions of educators and parents are indeed significant, the child's self-perception plays a significant role in determining their motivation to face the challenges posed by dyslexia. In the context of this study some dyslexic children perceived that their condition was a problem within themselves, demonstrating that a medical approach can render a child pessimistic and accepting of the situation as an inherent and unchangeable feature of their lives. This can cause indifference and hamper attempts to improve their situation. Viewing dyslexia through a medical perspective has influenced perceptions regarding the word 'dyslexia'. The medical perspective is embedded in the Kuwaiti context to the extent that the majority of the participants felt the need to emphasise the normality of dyslexic students' appearance, perhaps reflecting the insecurity created by a society which very much views dyslexia as abnormal. The very notion that dyslexia could impact a child's outward appearance points to the fact that not only is dyslexia viewed through a medical perspective, but a rather distorted one at that.

Parents at both the Model and inclusive Schools consistently repeated the assertion that dyslexia is not a disability. This emphasis on dyslexia not being a disability or their children not being 'stupid' or 'lazy' could indicate that parents commonly encounter false perceptions, thus feeling the need to point this out due to insecurity. It is not surprising, therefore, that academics' challenges to the usefulness of the concept of dyslexia have been met by strong emotion and occasional hostility (Elliott, 2008). Moreover, Elliott (2014) states that it is a common parental concern that their child might be inaccurately perceived as unintelligent because of their literacy

difficulties. These perceptions might result in lower teacher expectations, which may impact the effort and support provided by teachers to help the child progress.

Similar to the issue with the disability label, Farrell, and Ainscow (2002) suggest that framing learning difficulties as deficits, as in the medical model, hinders advancement of special needs education and may distract focus from the shortcomings of educational institutions in addressing these children's needs.

In Kuwait, the medical discourse seen at the school level at least partially originates from the policy level, where a discourse of physical cures and rehabilitations continues to pervade. This demonstrates the belief that disability should be handled by professionals, in which medical expertise based of science direct education practice. An example of this is the certification system employed in Kuwait – this places the responsibility of advising a change of schools in the hands of the psychologist and not the teacher. This is a medical/facts-based approach, as it relies on IQ testing which places students according to their score, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

This 'professionalisation' has come to characterise the approach to dyslexia and has influenced policymakers and parents to support segregation over inclusion. The notion of professionalism, which dominates the policy, practice and language at different levels, has been used to convince policymakers and parents of the greater benefits of segregation over inclusive education. Abdullah's parents, for example, rejected the Model school and returned him to his previous school in spite of the benefits the child was gaining. In the study's context, the prevailing educational

culture can therefore be seen as a barrier to inclusion. This situation has arisen largely due to the stigma associated with the label of disability in the Kuwaiti context.

5.4.3 Dyslexia as specific characteristics

The interviewees used different terms to describe dyslexia and showed differing personal interpretations in terms of its nature. Machek and Nelson (2007) suggest that a general understanding of dyslexia would include an able individual who is impeded by literacy issues. This was not necessarily the case in the Kuwaiti context, as the findings demonstrated.

The participants in this study expressed that dyslexia is related to difficulties in writing, spelling, and reading and generally in education, or is sometimes related to sensory processing issues. Some teachers covered aspects of reading, spelling, and maths, as well as memory (short-term and long-term memory). The KDA's interpretation of dyslexia is that it serves as an umbrella term for varying symptoms which are linked to each other. The organisation explains that individual cases are distinguished from another by their differing symptoms or severity (KDA, 2013). This shows that such institutions are aware that dyslexia is a varied and diverse condition and that cases are not identical; in fact dyslexia represents a series of difficulties which can manifest themselves in different ways and to different degrees. Institutions such as the KDA understanding a more nuanced picture of dyslexia is a positive sign and a helpful starting point to developing policy.

In an attempt to gain insight into teachers' understanding of dyslexia, Reid (2001) poses the question 'what is dyslexia' (p. 11), expressing that many classrooms teachers are in essence asking for a working plan as much as for a definition of

dyslexia. This plan could emphasise the positive attributes of dyslexic students, while including the full range of difficulties they encounter in everyday life, such as spelling, writing and some aspects of memorisation, as supported by many activists. When teachers in this study were asked to describe a dyslexic student in the class, they used an educational description. They described students with dyslexia as having difficulty with both reading and writing.

Elliot and Griogorenko, (2014) state that the use of the term 'reading disability' focuses on the difficulty in reading rather than a myriad of other associated features that could be included within the term 'dyslexia'. Lipsett, (2009) argues that children struggle to read because the wrong teaching methods are used:

The reason that so many children fail to read and write is because the wrong teaching methods are used. The education establishment, rather than admit that their eclectic and incomplete methods for instruction are at fault, have invented a brain disorder called dyslexia. To label children as dyslexic because they're confused by poor teaching methods is wicked. (Lipsett, 2009, p.2)

This seems to be partly to blame in Kuwait, as the findings demonstrated that teachers themselves were very aware of their shortcomings. The claim that dyslexia has been invented is questionable, however, given the wide body of literature supporting its existence.

Regan and Woods, (2000) suggested that a teacher's practical understanding of dyslexia may be clearer than the definitions provided by institutions. Teachers can draw on their day-to-day experience, communication, and work with dyslexic students, providing realistic, critical, practical, and current insight. Their replies included different descriptions of dyslexia and referenced:

...elements beyond a simple behavioural observation of reading/spelling difficulty, with responses indicating causes/consequences at behavioural, cognitive and biological levels. (Regan and Woods, 2000, p. 337).

Teachers' interpretation of dyslexia may be less analytical and diagnostic than that of a researcher, however. Payne and Turner, (1999) suggest that a combination of the researcher's theoretical knowledge and the teacher's practical experience could provide a more holistic and complete definition of dyslexia

Some participants also occasionally associated dyslexia with other problems like sensory issues. This was mentioned in the literature as well, with Elliot and Griogorenko, (2014) stating that the difficulty should not be explained by other factors such as hearing impairment and other excluding factors like low intelligence should not feature in any individual judgements.

Fletcher et al. (2011) argue that measures of reading fluency, reading comprehension and spelling should also be routinely undertaken for assessment and differentiated intervention. These should be examined within the local context, i.e. taking into account the distinct features of the Arabic language which have been previously discussed. It is important to go beyond the basic descriptors, however, since individuals could be assessed by examining their unique reading profile, which can depend on many factors. This could be a more refined tool, yet even context-adjusted reading tests would represent a marked improvement from the current IQ testing approach.

In indicating commonly held misconceptions, Wadlington (2005) identified word reversal as often featuring in the identification of dyslexia. One such misconception identified in this study was memory issues. Many of the study participants associated

dyslexia with memory issues. The fact that this notion featured extensively in participants' statements may be due to the emphasis on rote learning. In Kuwait, and the Arab world in general, memorisation is a primary method of learning, particularly in the Arabic language, where students are constantly required to memorise poems or Quranic passages. English also involves rote learning, but is seen as a more fun and engaging subject, whereas Arabic is perceived old fashioned in its content and delivery method. It may therefore be due to the difficulty in reading these texts for memorisation, rather than memorisation itself, that poses a challenge for dyslexic students.

5.4.4 A child with dyslexia is 'normal...but'

The findings of this study showed that many teachers expressed concern about meeting educational needs of 'normal' but dyslexic children. In relation to special educational needs, it may be the case that 'normal but dyslexic' does have some validity. If the concept of dyslexia is accepted as a starting point for identification, yet, it is still denied by some parents as they consider their child's difficulty less severe, such children might be seen as having needs that relate not just to literacy and reading. Such children may not have a disability or a difficulty, but may be different in their learning style. Yet the issue of SEN for many discrepant readers and spellers may ultimately relate more to the interaction between ability, disability and curriculum, than to a single dimension of disability.

The parents expressed that the problems their children were experiencing were 'normal' and they were pleased with their children's enrolment into specialised schools (Model schools), with the exception of Abdullah's parents. They also tended

to blamed dyslexia/ learning difficulty itself as being the cause of the struggle faced by their children: “He is normal, but it is all because of dyslexia” (Ali’s mother).

These perceptions must be seen within the context in which they are expressed. Parents in Kuwait are now more empowered to fight for inclusiveness in schools. From the government’s side, there have been increased calls for parents to participate in addressing the challenges that slow learners and students with learning difficulties face in Kuwait’s public schools. Parents are called upon to participate actively in creating plans that offer guidelines for including students with difficulties into the mainstream schools (KDA, 2002). Such calls for cooperation among education stakeholders are anchored in the findings of various studies, in which working together and creating awareness is essential for solving the challenges that students face. Furthermore, the KDA further states that creating awareness means that having dyslexia-friendly schools ensure that teachers and school administration can be more responsive to dyslexic learners.

Creating awareness among parents is an important initiative. As mentioned in the identification section, one participant expressed how the issue was upsetting her, as her child was aware that there was a problem, but did not know why or how to remedy it. Informing parents about managing the challenges that their children face instead of feeling the frustration caused by the lack of awareness would be conducive to improving coordination between school and home. It is important that teachers know their students’ intellectual abilities to be able to offer the appropriate support and activities. (Elliot & Griogorenko, 2014).

Given that difficulties in reading can be identified at the behavioural level, there would be no need to wait for identification to confirm that the difficulty exists. This applies in the current study's context, because as discussed previously, teachers require training to be able to identify such difficulties, rather than waiting for consistent failure and/or intervention by psychologists.

Davis (2010) states that a child experiencing reading difficulties will struggle to keep pace with their peers. This was also established in the study's interviews, with one parent also expressing frustration at the child's performance across all subjects due to a perceived inability to read and write. The current curriculum places great emphasis on writing and reading, which creates a difficult 'inclusive' environment for those having such issues. Reading, writing and spoken language are very important for the child, especially during pre-school years. In this period, it is the role of the parent to diagnose the problem and seek ways of ensuring that their children can cope with it. The Kuwaiti system, similar to many others, does not have any assessment for pre-kindergarten literacy skills, which can hinder parents' ability to recognise that there is a problem. Parents also are under pressure to prove that their children are 'normal' and can compete with others because of social pressures. This cultural influence makes it difficult for them to acknowledge that their children may need specialised education. Even if some parents are aware that the impact of dyslexia can be alleviated, they are, however, still concerned that society will view their child as 'disabled', and are quick to point out that this is not the case. Such sentiments mean that parents may not seek schools in which teachers specialise in dyslexia because they believe they should conform to societal norms and push their

child to succeed in the regular education system. This attitude can, however, have positive aspects, as it can motivate parents to support their children in learning process. Elliot and Griogorenko, (2014) argued that “rather than having a label for life, any such designation would depend on an individual’s current reading performance. Thus a child might fluctuate from having a reading disability or not, while also having other forms of reading difficulty or not, as he or she moves through school” (p. 180).

5.4.5 Can a child overcome dyslexia?

Public awareness of dyslexia in Kuwait is inconsistent and contradictory. Society views disability as being the exclusive domain of those who are severely cognitively or physically impaired. Most people are not aware of other disabilities, such as learning difficulties and slow learning. Some teachers pointed to the reluctance of parents to accept identification and transfers to Model schools to avoid stigma. On the other hand, other teachers pointed out cases where parents agreed to the transfer to avoid discrimination within the mainstream school system. Whatever the case may be, the fundamental problem remains the same, a starkly different understanding surrounding the notion of ‘disability’ to that of the West.

In parallel with a limited understanding of the nature of disability, findings demonstrated that dyslexia was seen as being treatable, or a condition that could be overcome with the correct support. This notion reflects the understanding held by the CCET. This view emerges in the Model schools’ policy, which explains that this is the reason for Model schools being restricted to the primary stage. Model school interviewees also believed that dyslexia could be overcome. Inclusive school staff

did not mention the issue of treatment; only some mentioned that their initial introductory seminars mostly dealt with basics of dyslexia and learning difficulties and that they were in need of training for the subsequent steps to take after diagnosis.

This belief that dyslexia can be overcome is an issue in school culture as well as at the policy level and stems from the fundamental idea that dyslexia can be overcome. This perception can be linked with the fact that dyslexia is translated as 'reading difficulty' in the Arabic language. The use of the term 'difficulty' allies with a quotation in the Holy Quran that declares, "Verily, with every difficulty there is relief" (Surah Al Inshirah, 6). This religious text is widely seen as the guiding moral force in society and is viewed as containing sound wisdom which can be applied in any period of human development. This literal interpretation of the religious text (with these views being echoed by clergy and other texts) is reflected in the parents' understanding that dyslexia is a problem that can be treated (Jussim & Harber, 2005)

Regardless of educational background or culture, dyslexic children exhibit different difficulties and abilities. While many specialists concur that there is no 'cure' for dyslexia, education provision and support, socio-economic background (parents' education level, affordability of specialist help) and the level of difficulty impact the severity of dyslexia and to what extent it will be an impediment to the child. Even for students who are fortunate in terms of quality education, social-economic status, and level of difficulty, stigma can undermine all these positive aspects. According to the KDA, there is a lack of understanding of what dyslexia is and as a result, dyslexic people have to overcome numerous barriers to make a full contribution to society.

5.5 Interpretation and Implementation of Inclusion of Children with Dyslexia

Part of the second research question, “How are children with dyslexia included?” is the guiding force for the enquiry in this section. The way in which schools interpret and implement inclusive practices will be highlighted. My findings underscore some of the obstacles to the inclusion of children with dyslexia and learning difficulties more generally - these include social stigma, pessimistic attitudes, and lack of coherent policy. Policies around early identification and intervention are yet to be introduced in Kuwait. Mainstream schools are usually left to identify children who have learning difficulties but do not exhibit any sensory or physical disability (as such children are identified at an earlier stage). Once these difficulties are identified, they are seen as challenges, as staff at inclusive schools admitted that they lacked the ability to accommodate the needs of such children. Many staff see the optimal solution as being a transfer to a Model school, as it only there they can obtain the necessary support. Parents too can eventually become convinced by this and agree to the transfer.

Rix (2011) discussed how specialist special schools in England positioned themselves, and found that many such schools presented their status as ‘inclusive’ either by intending to make all feel welcome, or through OFSTED approval of inclusive practices. In response to the use of the term inclusive, Rix called for a representative principle to be adopted, which would shift the focus from individuals to a whole school setting , that is “the community and organizational structures of the setting are representative and inclusive of a full cross-section and local community in all that it does”(p. 275). Any approach undertaken in Kuwait should

hence be holistic and all-encompassing, going beyond not only the student, but outside the school into communities. This would be done in consideration of the socio-cultural context, as communities are more likely to organise along familial and tribal lines, which can serve as powerful and ready vehicles for social change through the spreading of awareness around new social phenomena.

Model schools provide segregated provision, being specialised in terms of their intake of children. Specialisation has a special funding structure in Kuwait, with Model schools receiving preferential financial support from the government as flagship projects. The establishment of the Model schools for students with learning difficulties has raised issues. This is because some parents held the view that dyslexia was not a disability and felt that it should not be used as a reason for excluding children from their schools. This endorsement by some of the stakeholders in the education process should not be seen as definitive, however, as some participants felt differently. Some inclusive school staff perceived dyslexia students as requiring special attention from teachers, thus hindering their ability to provide the same level of care to all the other students.

5.5.1 Understanding inclusion

In this study, participants had differing personal conceptions of inclusion. The first issue to highlight is the uncertainty about the implications of the term 'inclusive'. Contradictory views were shown by some participants, between the right to be included and the impossibility of inclusion. Glazzard (2014) states that "the main problem is that there is no shared understanding of the term. It means different things to different people and interpretations of inclusion are shaped by vested interests

and cultural values” (p. 108). The findings of my study are consistent with those by MacBeath et al (2006); while teachers welcomed inclusion in principle, in daily practice they faced problematic issues and put boundaries around this welcoming culture.

This vagueness and confusion over defining ‘inclusion’ leads to very different interpretations, as some teachers in my study showed negative attitudes to inclusion in general and had low expectations of children with dyslexia coping with inclusive schools under current provision. In the inclusive schools, the response to the needs of children with dyslexia added to the lack of knowledge and the establishment of the Model schools led to confusion about who held responsibility for supporting children with learning difficulties/dyslexia. Teachers had varying perspectives on inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) and more generally towards students with disabilities (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). As the term ‘inclusion’ has been criticised for its lack of clarity (Avramidis et al., 2002; Sikes et al., 2007), inclusion presents a challenge, as schools require a practical framework to adjust to meet the diverse needs of learners (Mittler, 2000).

There needs to be “a clear understanding of the concept of inclusive education in the cultural context in which it is developed” (Miles & Singal, 2010, p. 8). As a result of new theories and ideology being imposed without considering the nature of each context, many children with special needs who are included within the public education system are being poorly supported. As Armstrong et al (2010) suggest:

Unfortunately, the majority of theorists from the developed West apply Western theories to the entire world without due consideration of the economic situation, cultural heritage and composition, and without truly listening to the voices and experiences of those who have experienced colonization as part of their history

and have day-to-day experience of the challenges of educational and economic development (2010, p. 120).

As discussed at various point in this study, the Kuwaiti contexts presents distinct challenges, which should be taken into account in approaching any areas requiring reform. Model school teachers displayed more understanding of the term 'inclusion' and more accepting attitudes towards children with dyslexia. They were not in favour of inclusion, however, with their practical experience being the main factor shaping their understanding and attitude to inclusion of children with learning difficulties dyslexia and the preference for Model schools. In fact, little inclusive practice was evidenced through observation in the Model schools, as students had already been segregated from mainstream schools and were now in a separate system. The support provision in these institutions appeared to be strong, however. If the Model school programme achieves greater success, it may become a more appealing option for parents of children with learning difficulties, meaning that the number of such schools will have to be greatly increased, along with the process of diagnosis and transfer. A key issue is that while such schools exist to narrow the achievement gap between students with learning difficulties and their counterparts, if such students fail to be identified they become marginalised and exposed to a sense of failure.

In the inclusive schools, children did participate in all aspects of school life, classes, assembly, play time and extra-curricular activities, yet in this case no observable support had been provided, as teachers saw the Model schools as a readily available alternative if children struggled in the mainstream system. Furthermore, meeting the educational needs of those with dyslexia was viewed as a crucial purpose of

inclusion, however not necessarily one best served by including them in mainstream schools.

It can be argued that a negative attitude to disabled people in general, specifically to including them within mainstream schools, has resulted in the Kuwaiti context. My findings suggest that the dominance of the medical model has cemented this negative attitude. Moreover, while schools may be able to influence society, they cannot ensure that students will participate in the wider community outside the school (Norwich, 2013).

Key influencing factors in the Middle East region are the pervasive presence of religion and a tightly knit social fabric. Religion and the personal beliefs of individuals shape and affect the understanding and support of dyslexic children and SEN in general. As a foundational belief in Islam is that the Quran is a direct transmission of God's word, its contents are thought to be a guide to society which remains valid regardless of time or place. The concept of inclusion can actually be extrapolated from the Quran through the following verses:

All of you, o believers, are brethren: hence, no blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the hale] and neither to you by others, whether it be food obtained from your [children's] houses or your fathers' houses...(24:61, Al-Nour Chapter).

In this regard, the Quran clearly rules against discrimination on any basis, notably against the disabled, prescribing equality for all, but also relieves them of certain duties by explaining "God does not burden any human being with more than he is able to bear: in his favour shall be whatever good he does and against him whatever evil he does" (2:286, Al-Baqara Chapter).

The Islamic faith's emphasis on surrendering to God's will and being content with life is often an issue which stands in the way of change in the region, be it social, economic or political. The Islamic viewpoint also puts heavy emphasis on the belief that every person has their 'lot' or fate in life, and trying to change this is going against the natural order of the world. When disabilities or any accidents arise, people comfort each other by explaining that this is part of God's plan, or a test of their faith – with “thanks be to God” being uttered by many as a way of appreciating that their 'fate' could have been worse and one should be thankful for what they have.

Lack of understanding and awareness certainly impacts the motivation to implement inclusion. This is not only related to human rights and moral obligations but also to professional, economic, and political realities. Barton and Tomlinson (2012) highlight that the motives for integration are not dissimilar to those of segregation. The two stem from a series of complex social, economic, and political factors, which tend to prioritise the 'needs' of the general population and education apparatus as a whole, instead of the needs of specific individuals.

Internal factors in Kuwait have combined to favour segregated provision for children with SEN. These factors share good intentions such as 'modernisation', but also negative effects such as stigma. Kuwait's educational development, in its early stages, adopted the (then in-vogue) segregated SEN provision in special schools but then failed to keep up with developments. Now, inclusive education as a global agenda is coming to Kuwait via the international influence of the UN and the tendency to look abroad for solutions. An example of a regional initiative of inclusive

education was the creation of the Arabic Statement for dyslexia (Arab Regional Meeting, 2004).

Western-dominated organisations such as the UN are often called upon to assist in the development of education. In fact, the potential for inclusion through collaboration with Western experts was explored by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, but without a framework of goals, definitions, coordination and expectations, inclusion remains in the rhetorical domain. The UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in 1994 responded to this by prescribing inclusion as a human rights issue. Elliot (2010) doubted the role played by international norms in the realities of education in the developing world, however, as such commitments often require a great number of resources and excessive expertise, which may not be present in such nations as they are often drafted in by and from developed nations. The findings displayed that expertise and political will appeared to be a greater challenge than resources.

There have been challenges in differentiating between the concepts of inclusion and integration. Special education providers in Kuwait have historically used the term 'integration' to mean combining students with learning difficulties in the same class with other children. The Ministry of Education unveiled its strategy of educational reform in Kuwait for 2005-2025 in 2008. The in-service training discussed in this report does not mention special needs provision. Furthermore, the only upcoming program to improve 'integration' and 'merging' was the report to include children with physical disabilities in mainstream schools. This strategy has long been in place and does not represent a new development.

The same report concedes that inclusive education faces several crucial hurdles:

...we are still, despite being in the twenty-first century, facing major challenges in the educational integration of people with disabilities. How can we ask for educational integration when Kuwait still has special education schools established in the fifties ... and providing educational services for students with disabilities in an isolated school environment? (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 94)

While the report identifies these issues, it does not suggest any policy changes relating to inclusion and it does not concede the lack of policy in the first place. The current situation, as I discovered through interviews with teachers and even headteachers, is that the mainstream system suffers from a lack of clear policy, along with lack of awareness of any policy whatsoever.

As for the interchangeable usage of the terms inclusion and integration, Pijl et al (1997, p. 2) claim that both terms have been employed to discuss similar concepts. In contrast, other researchers such as Vislie (2003, p. 20) argue that “the two notions have different foci, and [...] they should not be mixed”. Farrell (2000, pp. 154) defines inclusion as a process that allows dyslexic students to take “a full and active part in school-life, be a valued member of the school community and be seen as an integral member”. This definition contained the view that schools should not make intentional allowances for individual needs. Other researchers have disagreed with this, claiming that the process of inclusion calls for fundamental changes to the curriculum, pedagogy, grouping of learners, and assessment approaches.

5.5.2 Criteria for inclusion

Interviewees had differing views about which children could be taught in inclusive schools. The major factor in shaping their attitudes was the severity of the disability. Some teachers in the current study expressed that children with learning difficulties

could not be accommodated in regular classes, and instead needed a modified syllabus with greater emphasis on literacy. This was due to their views that such skills could not be taught with the extra attention required while there would be many other students to attend to.

School staff also suggested equipping schools to meet the needs of students with dyslexia and other types of SEN. They all mentioned the workload and the large class sizes. Lindsay (2003) agrees with the current study findings that inclusion is a process which faces both conceptual and practical challenges. The starting point is the vision for the school to be able to adjust and embrace social reforms.

Villa and Thousand (2005) assert that changing schools requires a vision for inclusion which is very clear, understandable and shared by all the educational stakeholders. This view was also confirmed by Maloney (2005), who adds that there should be a conceptualisation and exemplification of the vision in a practical manner in order to avoid conflict with the surrounding culture. A lack of vision leads to the absence of a proper environment in schools for innovation and acceptance of change.

In order to implement the vision, improved skills and knowledge on the part of teachers, parents, and other education practitioners are required. The need for professional development which prepares and motivates educators to adopt inclusion is essential, as in doing so, they can be encouraged, motivated, and be made to feel confident that they are the appropriate parties to implement the process. Inadequate resources or the absence of the correct resources could be seen as key

hindrances to the implementation of change in mainstream schools towards a reality that would include children with special needs.

Adapting the curriculum and other aspects like homework require changes in school practices and classroom environment. In the current study, some teachers expressed how children with dyslexia struggle to learn the large number of new words provided in language classes. Such views show that the school curriculum in its current form does not offer sufficient accommodations in the curriculum for dyslexic children.

An important step would be the publication of education policy by the Ministry of Education which advocates for inclusion and offers guidance to schools. According to Thomas and Vaughan (2004), there should be a well-structured and clear policy on the issue of special needs in schools and the actions that should be taken to ensure changes to attitudes within schools. Both long-term and short-term plans for policy are required to ensure that teaching in the primary and higher education systems provides equal opportunities for students. Peters (2004) outlines clear steps that should be taken in order to have a policy that supports dyslexic children. He states that there should be detailed documentation on timelines, with agencies given the mandate to identify dyslexic children and with clear roles and responsibilities for all involved parties.

Peters (2004) also strongly recommended more parental support for dyslexic children. He affirms that the education system is only able to manage dyslexic cases with the cooperation and support of parents. There are some cases where parents do not have sufficient information and understanding of dyslexia, hence they cannot

offer the much needed support. A strong school-home relationship positively impacts the learning experience of the child. Cook and Swain (2001) agree with Peters that collaboration between parents and teachers improves the performance of dyslexic children or those with other special needs. When teachers and parents share experiences, they can build a clearer and more holistic view of the child's situation in both the home and school contexts, as well as how this can be improved.

The development of an inclusive environment requires positive attitudes, strong leadership and the full involvement of teachers. For inclusion to serve its purpose, classroom and school practices should centre on the child (UNESCO, 1994). The teacher is hence tasked with facilitating learning, yet Ajuwon (2008) explains that for the teacher to successfully achieve this, teachers should have a range of skills, including team teaching, co-operative learning strategies, mastery learning, curriculum-based assessment, assessing learning styles, facilitating peer tutoring, and social skills.

In Kuwait, poor understanding among education professionals around inclusion is an important factor. Without the provision of training to provide the theoretical and practical foundations of the concepts, any success at the policy level may translate into poor implementation (Fullan, 2002). Some of the reservations held by educators regarding inclusion involve the physical appearance, the severity of the disability and cognitive capabilities (IQ level) of the child. Al-muhareb, (2007) states that educators' negative attitudes have been evidenced in some studies conducted in Kuwait. The current study, however, contrasted the findings of this research (Avramidis et al, 2000), and displayed a more positive approach towards the concept of inclusion.

Despite much acclaim for headteachers in Kuwait, as Fullan, (2001) mentions: “the gatekeepers for innovation, as they determine the fate of innovations from outside” (p. 59), my findings showed that the headteachers lacked a prominent role in the development of inclusion. The Ministry of Education failing to delegate this role to headteachers represents a hindrance to the development and assessment of policy and practice. Teaching staff felt side-lined and that they weren’t playing an active role in the development of school policy. This resulted in a weak knowledge of school policy or even its existence, as shown by the findings. Fullan (2001) stresses the importance of teacher involvement in reform for the adjustments to be accepted on a broad scale, as without their involvement, the motivation and interest of teachers to develop initiatives is negatively impacted (Fullan, 2001). As stated in the Salamanca Declaration, students with special educational needs should be able to attend regular schools that can cater to their needs through child-centred pedagogy (Johnson, 2004).

In Kuwait, findings have revealed potential obstacles raised by teaching staff surrounding the implementation of inclusion. Some of the issues they raised included class size, inflexible curriculum, resource constraints and school practice which prioritises specialist subject teachers, as mentioned in Chapter 4. A key obstacle is the focus on traditional teaching methods and the prioritisation of exams and syllabi, so in this respect, the teacher’s role centres on the direct transmission of knowledge. In 2008 UNESCO hosted a workshop in Dubai at which the weakness of the role of teachers in inclusion was described as an area for improvement, with the organisation observing that national curricula in the Gulf States tended to ignore the

diverse learning needs of their populations (UNESCO, 2008). The issue of exam-based assessment was also raised, with the report suggesting that a formative model should be adapted to improve inclusive practice. Such issues were also present in the current study, which tended to mean that students with learning difficulties were marked as 'outsiders' in the school environment.

5.6 Support for Children with Dyslexia

The analysis of the current study shows that support for children was lacking, imprecise, inconsistent, or not provided to begin with. The current curriculum in Kuwait allows little flexibility for insertion or omission, as it focuses on information retained and then assessed through exams. Intervention planning was also characterised by vagueness and did not involve the child. Individual Learning Plans have been adopted in Kuwait, but work on a group basis. Aside from the curricular constraints to flexibility, school administrations also do not provide consistent degrees of autonomy to teachers for innovation. A set of official and comprehensive frameworks for adjusting lessons is thus lacking. Given all these issues, the fundamental problem remains the very absence of support in many cases, as some schools did not demonstrate any adjustment either in curriculum or lesson planning. The findings of the current study showed that inclusive school teachers did not provide any methods or strategies to support children with dyslexia in their classes; moreover, they did not know what action to take or how to take it. This finding corroborates with the Arapogianni (2003) study conducted in Greece, which investigated the approaches used by teachers to support students with dyslexia in the classroom as well as their knowledge and training on dyslexia and their

collaboration with other professionals. The findings of that study showed that most of the participants did not know what to do to support students with dyslexia in the classroom, as they did not have any training on dyslexia and had a lack of understanding about the nature of the students' difficulties. Teachers did not feel responsible for providing interventions due to their lack of knowledge about dyslexia. The findings of the current study were consistent with this, showing the lack of availability of appropriate materials or resources for students with dyslexia and learning difficulty, which is, according to Mackay (2004), one of the criteria for dyslexia-friendly practice and is closely linked with support for students with dyslexia in the classroom.

In Model schools, where despite changes to the curriculum, teachers still cited curricular inflexibility as an issue, with teachers having low expectations of these children and excessive content-centred learning. Inclusive school teachers complained of the same issue, particularly a lack of expertise and IEPs, hence it is difficult adjust the curriculum and teaching methods appropriately. Ferguson (2008, p. 144) contends that in order to provide successful inclusion, a transformation from a teacher-directed classroom to systemic school adjustments is required. He cited successes where schools have sought to energise curricula by making them more engaging and meaningful, or adjusting learning on a personalised basis for each student. Furthermore, he also mentions the emergence of a community atmosphere where students support and participate in one another's learning. The structural constraints to achieving such goals have been identified, with issues such as the curriculum requiring change from the Ministry of Education and even the executive

branches of government, as teachers must still abide by performance criteria regardless of any personal initiatives taken. This is not to say that individual efforts cannot and are not being made, as seen in the findings in this study, however it must be understood that the nature of the education system in Kuwait means that Ferguson's suggestions could only be implemented after a profound structural reform in the education system, whereas in many Western societies, schools as well as teachers have far more leeway to adjust the curriculum and teaching methods. A community atmosphere is a more immediately attainable goal, but it should be noted that much of the curriculum does not call for cooperative work, nor does it inspire the kind of challenging discussion that such initiatives seek to bring about.

Another issue with the curriculum that emerged from the findings was the emphasis and quantity of content. This results in a teacher-centric environment, with limited capacity to address the needs of children with learning difficulties. The study participant teachers stated that they do not differentiate or give less homework to students with dyslexia or the ones who are struggling in order to support them. Pollock and Waller (2003) state that teachers should carefully consider the amount and type of homework given to students with dyslexia, as they return from school more tired than their classmates because school work takes longer for them and requires more effort.

Staffing issues play out not just in the quality but also the quantity of staff. Black-Hawkins et al (2007) demonstrated that both primary and secondary teachers identified that TAs played critical roles in encouraging participation and improving performance in inclusive environments. This poses a problem in Kuwait, where TAs

are not found in mainstream schools. Including children with learning difficulties in mainstream classes is understood to be difficult without such additional support. In fact, the value of TAs in such environments could be underestimated, as TAs were actually recently removed. Rose (2001) argues that TAs allocating extra attention to certain individuals can serve to isolate students from their peers and could be seen as a form of labelling, hence the approach should be a whole-class one. In more recent research by Rose and O'Neill (2009) a shift from individual to class focus was observed in the TA's role. Teachers should hence be trained to oversee and cooperate with TAs as partners. Hunter and O'Connor (2006) identify the lack of training as a major obstacle for all types of staff in the enhancement of inclusive provision.

Support and understanding for both parents and students with dyslexia/a learning difficulty are helpful in equipping parents with sound knowledge and maintaining a child's morale. The findings demonstrated that some parents were confused, frustrated, and concerned, as they were not receiving sufficient support. Griffiths et al (2004) performed an assessment in five LEAs (Local Education Agencies) in the South West of England on school-parent interaction concerning dyslexia provision in mainstream schools. It was revealed that parents who were unsuccessful in obtaining support from the school would instead resort to private assessments and tuition. Similarly, in the current study some parents resorted to the KDA to get the right support after being disappointed by the school's response. When a parent alerts a teacher that their child may be dyslexic, teachers can offer to adjust methods, give advice for home support, set targets, and request a teaching assistant. Parents can

also give feedback to professionals on the impact of approaches that have been attempted with children. A school deputy headteacher expressed similar sentiments in that parents and even teachers need at least five years to be able to understand the concept of dyslexia and learning difficulties associated with dyslexia fully. There was not a lot of support and agreement among the participants regarding the next step to be taken after a confirmed dyslexia diagnosis.

Support for dyslexic students should not be limited to the academic realm, as moral support is another crucial element. Ryan (2004, P.5) states that it is important to recognise and appreciate the success of children, as this encourages them to strive for greater achievements. The strengths of these children are more evidence in subjects such as art, hence such subjects need to be more emphasised. Of all the efforts suggested by the previous studies and the current study, it is important that there is continuous communication among the parents, teachers and the community regarding the best approaches.

This presents a challenge in Kuwaiti culture, as failing and repeating the year is much criticised in the educational system, stigmatising both children and parents. This phenomenon reveals itself in various ways. Firstly, the school cannot progress beyond the diagnosis without parental consent. This parental consent is influenced by society's perception to a large degree, as it would be in most countries. The effect of this is more pronounced in Kuwaiti and Arab culture, however, as close familial ties and large household sizes allow for little privacy when it comes to such issues. Adding to this, while Model schools are technically categorised as mainstream institutions, it is fairly well known within society that these schools cater to children

with learning difficulties. Parents are thus reluctant to send children to such schools, as this is a form of instant labelling. It would be difficult to advise improving moral support for Kuwaiti children when they are surrounded by a society and education system that undermines this by interpreting success largely through grades and tangible achievements. Any effort to improve parents' understanding (and consequently moral support) could therefore be improved by changing the educational culture of society.

5.7 Raising awareness of dyslexia

The Kuwait Dyslexia Association (2002) states that there have been calls for educators and parents to help in solving issues that appear among slow learners and a large number of students in each class at Kuwaiti public primary schools. The increasing calls for early diagnosis of learning difficulties have also been echoed by the KDA alongside UN local bodies. Understanding the challenges that learners face in mainstream schools at an early age can help parents make decisions about looking for alternative learning environments suitable for their children. The KDA (2002) maintain that it is possible to reduce the instances of a child feeling like a failure with early intervention. Early identification means that approaches can be put in place to ensure that the child is diagnosed and supported at the preschool and primary level.

The KDA also occasionally publishes reports regarding dyslexia and development efforts in this area. The survey report for 2004 shows that 6.3% of the student body in Kuwaiti public primary schools have a learning difficulty condition. After the survey report was released, the Ministry of Education in Kuwait issued directives to form a

Dyslexia Higher Educational Committee in order to create awareness of dyslexia in mainstream schools. The awareness campaign was commented on by several researchers, including El-Beheri (2008), who said that there had been an impact on dyslexia, but that the overall effectiveness of the process was not evaluated. Such actions may lead observers to believe that the government is ready and willing to offer guidance and services to dyslexic children and their families, provided there is enough information about the issue. This ties in with the UNESCO recommendations; as such steps taken by the government represent a starting point to creating the sort of awareness necessary to facilitate successful inclusion.

The use of a case study sheds greater light on the role played by the medical model in giving rise to negative attitudes surrounding dyslexia students and poor awareness among teachers and students with dyslexia alike. A report by the Ministry of Planning concedes this shortcoming by explaining that the poor awareness at all levels means that efforts are yet to be focused on the possibility of ‘integrating’ students with learning difficulties into mainstream education (2006, p. 7). To lay the groundwork for initiatives targeted at inclusion, awareness must therefore be built in society about the nature of dyslexia.

5.8 Dyslexia-friendliness

The third research question explored to what extent ‘dyslexia-friendliness’ is a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools. There is a need for a comprehensive system of identification, assessment and appropriate resources with a pedagogical approach. Another aspect to address would be the socio-cultural realm. Kuwaiti society understands children’s difficulties in terms of ‘disabled’ and

'non-disabled' and that the influence of specialisation reproduces exclusion in the name of providing 'better' provision for children with learning difficulties. The social model of disability states that a person's impairment is not the cause of disability; rather that disability is a result of the organisation of society, which in turn both excludes people with impairments and puts them at a disadvantage. This approach has a number of implications for inclusive education (Crow, 1996). If education should be inclusive, then by what criteria should its successes be judged, what practices is it contesting, and what common values is it supporting?

Crombie (2002) describes accommodations as a set of arrangements to assist dyslexic children in exploiting their strengths (cited in Reid 2009). A more dyslexia-friendly school environment requires active interaction with parents, taking their concerns into consideration, and dealing with these concerns with understanding and respect. One possible solution, differentiation, or rather the variation of strategies, was not observed in this research. My investigation into school practice and the experience of students with learning difficulties demonstrated a discord between differentiation and a whole-class approach. This discord, in my opinion, sums up the state of dyslexia friendly practice and policy in Kuwait, where there seems to be beginnings of supportive practice, but misinformation coupled with a lack of clear guidance often ends up leading educators, parents and pupils astray.

Skrtic (1991) has argued that special education has not developed as a rational project since "historically it has served as a myth and a legitimating device for school organizations to cope with the stifling value demands of their institutionalized

environments” (p. 181). From an inclusive education perspective, Skrtic’s critique is based on specific values about education and the society that it serves.

Model schools generated the perspective that inclusion of children with dyslexia are beyond the scope of mainstream schools, which cannot accommodate such children. Yet, as Barton (1995) argues, “Special education entails a discourse of exclusion and this is seen as a particularly offensive aspect of such provision” (p. 157).

Implementing inclusive/dyslexia friendly practices within the general education context would be a substantial development and may be cause for celebration for many students, their families, and those who support the idea of inclusion. Dyslexia-friendly provision does not focus on groups of children with learning difficulties or dyslexia; rather it concentrates on diversity and how schools respond to the diversity of all students. The Ofsted Guidance for Evaluating Educational Inclusion (2000) states that:

An educationally inclusive school is one in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and well-being of every young person matter [...] this does not mean treating all pupils in the same way. Rather it involves taking account of pupils’ varied life experiences and needs. [...] They identify any pupils who may be missing out, difficult to engage, or feeling in some way to be apart from what the school seeks to provide. (Ofsted, 2000, p. 7)

There is a need to recognise that the characteristics of the support provided in inclusive schools must meet the needs of children with learning difficulties to an acceptable standard and should not be determined by external experiences, but through strategies which will support the Kuwaiti context. It is very difficult to implement dyslexia-friendly provision when the basic groundwork of required support is not there. The findings of this study emphasise the need for both

researchers and the Ministry of Education to consider national and local contexts as well as global agendas when developing a policy of inclusion. This is highlighted by Armstrong et al (2010) in relation to inclusive education. They call for a greater dialogue and engagement between the West and the global South, arguing that:

Educators from the developed world need to appreciate that what others want or need may not be what would be expected by those from the developed world. Ideas that may seem appropriate based on one's own experience do not necessarily translate into something that is 'good for' people whose experience is quite different. This realization is about respecting other peoples, and it is ... about fixing the world, because we cannot fix it by transposing it into a first-world paradigm with a first-world understanding (2010, p.123).

A national initiative of "Dyslexia-Friendly Schools" was instigated by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the KDA and the British Dyslexia Association. This took place in 10 schools across Kuwait (Elbeheri, 2008). Such actions should have an impact on increasing understanding and achievement in Kuwaiti schools (Al Adwani & Al Shaye, 2012).

The KDA's awareness campaign aimed towards "dyslexia-friendly schools", in other words to encourage schools to make themselves more responsive to the needs of children with dyslexia, includes raising teachers and parents awareness about dyslexia and what can be done to help children with dyslexia in their schools. (Kuwait Dyslexia Magazine, 2007). It has met with an untimely halt, the reasons of which could not be ascertained, as nobody seemed to know what happened. This has left dyslexic students with grim prospects for a better education, and is reflected in the lack of awareness of and provision for dyslexia from most of the study participants. It also sheds light on the bigger problem plaguing the Kuwaiti society in regards to all major policy formation, in which the absence of organised protocols hinders even

the best of intentions and efforts by hard-working people. Indeed most of the positive changes in the country as a whole has always been met with a bombardment bureaucratic obstacles, due to social, religious and cultural implications. Additionally the typical 'term' in a government leadership position is four years, after which there are usually mandated rotations of positions, leaving the unfinished work possibly lost forever.

The tension between the 'inclusion' provided by inclusive schools versus 'specialisation' (which represents a form of segregation in the Model schools) and between 'inclusion' versus 'integration' in Kuwait indicate that the development towards more dyslexia-friendly provision is unlikely to be straightforward. A reluctance to adopt 'full inclusion' was found in the concerns of teachers when considering academic achievement, as well as meeting the needs of those children. This reluctance consequently led to self-contradictory views among some school staff, that on the one hand, they were expressing their commitment to inclusion from a social and human rights perspective, but on the other, they emphasised the limitations of including all children, especially those with more pronounced difficulties. This may be due to the medical model's influence on perspectives, as Glazzard (2014, p.114) states that "Inclusion should operate within a social model of disability because it is now generally accepted that disability is a product of social, cultural, environmental and economic influences which result in people with impairments being restricted from accessing goods and services". Such perspectives were altogether absent from responses, meaning that the social model could play a valuable role in informing people's views about dyslexia.

Rayner (2007, p.41) outlines this self-contradiction as follows:

...policy in the minds of teachers often represents an ideal and a template for a preferred state. In practice, policy is converted to a code or protocol for action that whilst reflecting the values and substance of the ideal will never actually be realized as a perfect match in the 'real world'.

This is the case with the concept of inclusion and its practical application as DFS, the reality of which is less simple, where many of inclusion's 'yes buts' (Sikes, et al., 2007, p. 360-361) come to light.

This contradiction may be further explained by the fact that inclusion in Kuwait is a recent development, therefore there is less experience of teaching children with learning difficulties/dyslexia according to their needs. The presence of these children within the mainstream classroom did not feel strange or uncomfortable to teachers until they were identified with dyslexia or a learning difficulty. There are many factors that are in play here. This is a practical example of how misinformation or even complete ignorance of the true nature of dyslexia can adversely affect the classroom environment when a dyslexic child is present. Furthermore, this demonstrates the concept of 'negative labelling' discussed in the literature, in which it is sometimes to the child's detriment to be identified and labelled. That is not to say that we should 'turn a blind eye' to dyslexia, it just suggests that identification without proper education and policy for support can actually 'backfire'. This is what the state of dyslexia is now in Kuwait, enough work has been put in to form reasonable channels for identification, however limited they may be; after that, it is mostly a downwards spiral as the parents and child are for the most part left to battle with a myriad of extremely difficult dilemmas in their search for a better education. Some may even argue that had there not been a means for identification the students would be better

off than their current predicament. However, more time for implementation of inclusion and for educators to gain experience of teaching children with dyslexia and learning difficulties in general may lead to more positive attitudes and more dyslexia-friendly practices, even if no holistic approach is implemented.

The findings revealed that none of the participants were familiar with the concept of dyslexia-friendliness. It was not unexpected, therefore, that teachers and staff were unable to convey the purpose and the usefulness of implementing dyslexia-friendly concepts and demonstrated uncertainty about the idea within mainstream schools. Fullan (2001) strongly suggests that accepting change happens only as a result of teachers engaging in the process of educational reform.

This lack of awareness demonstrated that teachers were not active in the process of developing inclusive education and were marginalised. This overlooking of school staff and teachers in the decision-making process subsequently leads to a failure to motivate and interest staff to adopt new changes and initiatives (Fullan, 2001); indeed, it was noticed that even the active teachers, who had some interesting ideas into how they may better tackle this issue, were often dismissed, to the point where they eventually had to give-up trying to instil change.

The development of dyslexia friendly practise in Kuwait would require a positive culture underpinning a positive attitude, effective leadership, and more active engagement, but to develop this culture would require more support from policies coming from the MOE in Kuwait.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter, the main findings were of my study were discussed in relation to my research questions and the existing literature, highlighting some similarities and differences between my study and previous studies. Some issues that have been discussed in this study are yet to be investigated by other researchers, however. The current study demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding dyslexia in Kuwaiti primary education. Accordingly, the remaining parts of the outline of this understanding are missing, which confirm the complexity of the concept. Implementing inclusion for children with dyslexia is also misunderstood, which consequently affects the incentives of schools considering doing so. Although Kuwait is a wealthy country, few resources are available for children with learning difficulties and dyslexia in mainstream schools; however, some of these resources are available at Model schools. The study has addressed some challenges for accommodating and including children with dyslexia. Understanding these challenges would assist accordingly in the implementation of more dyslexia-friendly strategies and enable guidance to be put into words and applied to effect significant change.

These findings suggest that an urgent intervention from the MOE to offer some in-service training for teachers instructing classes that include children with both 'learning difficulties' and dyslexia would be hugely beneficial. Since the number of those children is considerable in relation to the Kuwaiti population, I also think that teachers' initial preparation programmes should be scaled up and new modules should be added. According to Stakes and Hornby (1998), having mandatory special

education courses in all pre-service teacher education programmes is desirable if teachers are to develop positive attitudes towards students with SEN (Sari, 2007).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This chapter considers the contribution to Knowledge and recommendations for policy and practice relevant to the research question and indicates areas that may require further research.

6.2 Summary of the study

This thesis has sought to investigate how the Kuwaiti educational system conceptualises dyslexia. Through a study of six primary schools in a local authority that has implemented inclusion for children with learning difficulties/dyslexia, the current study aimed to explore the connection between this conceptualisation and the identification of dyslexia in children, as well as the support provided. Consequently, this study sought to respond to the following three research questions:

- a. How is dyslexia understood in primary education in Kuwait?
 - a. How do teachers, students, specialists and parents perceive dyslexia?
 - b. How do policies portray dyslexia?
- b. How are children with dyslexia identified, supported and included?
 - a. How are children with dyslexia identified?
 - b. How are children with dyslexia supported?
 - c. How are children with dyslexia included?
 - d. What are the perceptions of teachers, students and parents regarding these processes and practices?
- c. To what extent is 'dyslexia-friendliness' a useful concept and practice for Kuwaiti primary schools?

Since the study aimed to explore staff, parent and student perceptions of dyslexia in primary schools in Kuwait, the data were gathered through gaining participants' perspectives through interviews, observation and document analysis.

Responding to the research questions enabled me to present a vision for approaching dyslexia in the educational context of Kuwait. It also enabled me to determine the challenges for accommodating children with dyslexia in inclusive schools.

The qualitative approach taken during the course of this study provided rich sources of data for understanding dyslexia and learning difficulty in Kuwait. The case study approach made it possible to study the issues surrounding how the understanding of dyslexia is conceptualised and portrayed. A survey of perceptions surrounding dyslexia had previously been employed in Kuwait by some studies; however, the use of case studies allowed for the use of more than one method and provided the opportunity to gather the opinions of all parties involved in working with students with dyslexia.

The findings of the thesis have suggested that teachers tended to define dyslexia by focusing on difficulties and particular characteristics. In doing so, I found that when describing students with dyslexia, teachers often placed emphasis on the normality, or the idea of dyslexic students being 'normal, but'. In addition to this, identifying dyslexia in a child caused some teachers in inclusive schools to feel more distant towards the child than they had been prior to diagnosis. I also found that crucially, late identification led to delays in producing strategies within the school to accommodate the needs of the child.

A number of teachers called for better training for teaching children with SEN in general, particularly children with learning difficulties. They noted that they wished to engage with the issues of the different children they were teaching on an individual basis according to their individual abilities, rather than relying on basic theories. It was also noted that the pressures of work were a major factor in how capable teachers felt they were of tackling the issues presented to them. The findings of the study demonstrate that inclusive school teachers did not feel that they had received adequate support and felt overburdened.

In contrast to the inclusive school system, teachers in Model schools are prepared and trained before they encounter children with learning difficulties in the school. In these environments, timetables tended to be shorter and the teachers' workloads more manageable, as was the number of students in the classroom, this being less than half the number of students per class than in the inclusive schools. For these reasons, in Model schools the approach of teachers and the curriculum itself are changed to meet the abilities and the needs of children with learning difficulties.

There were, however, also similarities between the responses from Model and inclusive school teachers; they both felt they were controlled by the educational system and did not agree with the inclusion of students with learning difficulties because they felt that inclusive schools were generally unable to meet the particular needs of those children. Despite this and teachers' opposition to some current practice, some teachers in the inclusive schools argued that it was beyond their responsibility to support students with dyslexia, so they were carrying out a practice they did not believe in, not in order to support and help dyslexic students, but to

follow rules. This lack of flexibility often led to teachers creating coping strategies in the classrooms, some pursuing individual approaches to support, meaning teaching approaches are inconsistent.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes contributions towards an understanding of dyslexia/learning difficulties conceptually and practically. Through understanding the perspectives and views of the participants, this study demonstrates current practice in Kuwait to support children with dyslexia and learning difficulties in general. The finding of the current study makes a contribution to the limited research available on dyslexia and learning difficulties in Kuwait and the Gulf. It is hoped that the findings will close some of the existing gaps and help build new knowledge. The findings identified limitations in terms of appropriate identification, assessment, and support for children with dyslexia in primary education in Kuwait. I hope that this awareness will generate further research interest in this challenging field.

To the best of my knowledge, no study on understanding dyslexia conceptually and practically in the Kuwaiti context has yet been conducted. The study's context plays a role in shaping peoples understanding and attitudes. This study also makes some contribution to the knowledge of dyslexia beyond the Kuwaiti context. By exploring the Kuwaiti context, this research gives an opportunity for researchers who are not from Kuwait to understand the complexity of the understanding of dyslexia and how dyslexia is presided through and even experienced in a different context, which might also be pertinent for other countries that share a similar context to Kuwait. As

Schneider and Harkins (2009) state, “Looking beyond borders and oceans can always help to better understand what needs to be done at home” (p. 286).

The study allows the voices of the different participants, particularly parents of children with dyslexia, to be heard for the first time in the Kuwaiti context. This is intended to help shape the support provided to parents and students and inform decision-makers. By sharing the experiences and concerns of both parents and children, it is hoped that mainstream schools might be able to undertake a more targeted and better informed approach to improving practice. As a contribution to the wider global body of knowledge, it reveals how approaches to dyslexia and understandings differ from country to country, as well as demonstrating some of the potential obstacles and similarities that may be encountered when applying a globalised education framework (in this case inclusion) to a different culture.

Moreover, it appears that no study in Kuwait has yet reported that social and cultural factors influence the understanding of dyslexia, or how these understandings shape the orientation towards or against accommodating children with learning difficulties and dyslexia, specifically in mainstream schools. In its early stages, Kuwait’s educational development chose the then-fashionable strategy of segregated SEN provision in special schools and then failed to keep up with developments, as Chapter 4 explains, due to the nature of its political and government system and collectivist culture.

Furthermore, in terms of the research methodology, the current study has adopted a qualitative research design, an approach which has hitherto been neglected in Kuwait. It therefore prepares the ground for further dyslexia research in Kuwait using

this type of methodology to lead to a further and deeper understanding about dyslexia. Similarly, classroom observation as a data collection tool has so far been ignored by learning difficulties/dyslexia studies in Kuwait. In this study, however, observation helped in gaining deeper understanding of current practice. The current study also demonstrates that an interpretive framework can provide valuable and rich information about participants' perceptions. This approach has also been neglected in Kuwait; therefore I hope that my study may motivate researchers in Kuwait and countries with a similar socio-cultural context to pursue this framework in their studies.

6.4 Limitations and strengths of the study

The key limitations of this study are resource and methodology considerations. As well as the commonly-encountered problems of limited time, access and finance, this study was conducted in the Kuwaiti context in which only a limited amount of previous research into dyslexia has been done. In terms of methodology, considerations include the benefits, disadvantages and challenges of the many available methodological approaches; data collection is influenced by the project's overall approach. A larger student sample and more opportunities for contact might have been useful to the study; however the study confines itself within the following parameters:

1. The location of this study limits the scope of it to the inclusive education practice of only one local authority in Kuwait, which means that the results of this case study approach may not be generalised to other schools or other local authority areas. This was, however not necessarily the aim of the current

study; instead it sought deeper understanding of the educational provision and practices around dyslexia in Kuwait. Methodological triangulation raises the degree of trustworthiness in its findings, however (Cohen et al., 2003).

2. The sample of participants, in Kuwait, was limited to pupils in Year 5 with dyslexia in mainstream primary schools. Moreover, throughout this study, a number of problems arose that were beyond my control, thus limiting the number of the interviews I had originally planned. Despite my efforts to secure interviews with parents and despite the support of the school psychologist, it proved impossible to interview all the parents, as some were unwilling to consent to it. Another key issue seen in many parts of the developing world is a lack of accountability, resulting in often incorrect or disingenuous information being given by officials. If this is published in Kuwait and attributed to a certain government employee, there is no recourse, hence interviewees are not particularly careful about accuracy, with one example being the confusion surrounding the cessation of the Dyslexia Friendly Schools project.

Despite these limitations, the study still has the potential to contribute significantly to a further understanding of dyslexia in Kuwait. I would argue, however, that the significance of this study can be derived from the qualitative research design, which was adopted in order to explore understanding and practice in Kuwait and perspectives of parents, teacher, school staff and children with dyslexia. As this study does not aim to generalise, or to seek to import 'dyslexia-friendly' policies and practices that may be applied in the Kuwaiti context, its restricted generalisability may not be considered a limitation. It would be difficult to pass judgement on the

applicability of dyslexia friendliness policies in Kuwait for two reasons: firstly, as this study did not take an all-encompassing look at the education system and only saw some attempts at implementation. Secondly, some of those attempts partially or incorrectly followed dyslexia-friendly policies as seen in the West, so it is difficult to judge their success until such issues have been addressed.

6.5 Recommendations and implications

Ainscow (2004) notes that to examine ways of increasing support for learning difficulties at the individual level and to move to more inclusive education, a focus on the social environment is preferable. This approach towards encouraging inclusion necessitates what Hooker (2008) describes as a “fundamental solution”, placing a focus on all the practices and policies in the educational system. On the other hand, Hooker also suggests adopting “a pragmatic and realistic approach, [to] concentrate on leveraging the provision base which exists to achieve the next steps” (2008, p.10). Rather than seeking an immediate and comprehensive overhaul of the Kuwaiti education system, steps could thus be taken to address some of the issues highlighted in this study, during which a carefully considered long-term strategy could be formulated. One such area where this choice was seen may be in deciding between the provision of extracurricular classes or additional in-school provision for children with dyslexia or overhauling the curriculum and school environment to make it more accommodating so that such classes would not be required. Some recommendations of this study will now be presented. Alongside developing an understanding of the nature of the educational system in Kuwait, where the educational change is to be made, there is a specific need to increase the awareness

of learning difficulties amongst parents, teachers, and school staff. The case study approach adopted in the current study may, therefore, be an effective method of identifying socio-cultural influences which may in turn help identify and define both the barriers and facilitations in the Kuwaiti primary mainstream schools for including children with dyslexia and thus further case studies using different schools, age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds would be advisable.

This study should also serve as an indicator of the need to be more vigilant about raising awareness and minimising misconceptions among educators in organisations such as the Kuwait Dyslexia Association. Despite the length of time they have been teaching, a number of school staff who participated in the study had misperceptions that could have been potentially minimised through improved preparation by the universities or even training. In the Model schools, awareness was raised as there had been some form of training, whereas the inclusive school teachers had not received formal training at all. This has adverse effects on the identification and teaching of children with dyslexia, which could perhaps be remedied through improved training. Training is a priority, but not as it is in the current provision two separate pathways which are not conducive to inclusion. Training should be implemented in a way that mirrors the diversity of the educational needs of children. It is hoped that this may give teachers sufficient skills and knowledge to allow them to be confident in and capable of supporting a diverse range of children in mainstream schools.

This study highlights a lack of clear and carefully considered policies that support inclusive education in Kuwait. To develop a robust policy without considering their

purpose and practical implementation and which is not simply borrowed from the West requires both collaboration and a shared vision by all the stakeholders, from disabled people, families, the government, and non-governmental organisations to other health and social/educational professionals. A need for better and clearer guidance on dyslexia and learning difficulties in general for teachers and a change in strategy by both the Ministry of Education and schools has been highlighted by this study. To this end, stakeholders could assist in the development of policies which can both enhance and support inclusive education in the country, which crucially should include early identification and intervention strategies.

Furthermore, classrooms with educational resources in well-equipped schools would enable teachers and staff to offer more support to children with dyslexia within mainstream schools. This would be a goal within short-term reach, as securing funding for educational projects in Kuwait is not a particular constraint. Other factors relating to human resources are also a key factor in the enhancement of the inclusion of children with learning difficulties. Aside from training, the provision of additional staff, such as well-trained teaching assistants, could benefit children with dyslexia in large classes where teachers cannot provide such children with sufficient assistance. The presence of TAs is still a subject of debate within academia and should thus be approached with caution as an assisting factor, rather than a comprehensive solution.

These enhancements may be developed by encouraging a positive attitude towards disability in general and specifically to dyslexia and learning difficulties through raising social awareness and educating the community, thus helping people to

accept individual differences among students and ultimately learning how to include them not only within mainstream schools but society in general. By raising awareness of learning difficulty and disability in general, based on human rights, the media can be involved and become an important and active role in the promotion of social change. This may result in a more positive attitude towards disabled people and consequently towards inclusion.

Many parents of children with dyslexia and learning difficulties lack knowledge about the rights of their children, as many schools do not advertise the services of third-party organisations such as the KDA, where students can obtain dyslexia statements. To mitigate this, parents should be encouraged to challenge and to counter exclusionary practices in the current educational system through cooperation. This may be achieved with support from government and non-government organisations such as the KDA and CCET. In this way, they may be empowered to support more dyslexia-friendly practices and, with the necessary information, would engage more in the education of their children.

6.6 Recommendations for further research

In this study, mainstream schools were apparently limited in their ability to accommodate the needs of children with dyslexia and learning difficulties. Without early identification policies, children with dyslexia tend to struggle in mainstream schools and will often fail for more than one year before they are noticed. Factors highlighted by this study (such as the establishment of Model schools, the avoidance of stigma by parents, and the international pressure to promote inclusion) indicate that there is a pressing need to move to a more inclusive style of education. While

some of the questions surrounding the understanding of dyslexia in Kuwait have been answered by this study, many unanswered questions still remain in this regard, which could form the basis for future research in the field.

This study was focused on the perceptions of teachers, parents and children with dyslexia about the condition, both conceptually and practically. Additional studies might be conducted to examine the effects of parental involvement on the achievement of children with dyslexia to help gain understanding of perceptions among parents and teachers regarding what constitutes effective parental involvement. Research focusing on the views of parents and students would shed light on how schools may need to support and interact with both children with dyslexia and their parents.

The findings of the study indicate that there are issues with segregation practices in Model schools, whilst inclusive school environments seem to be characterised by negative attitudes and poor support. In order to adopt more friendly and inclusive practices, the policy and practice of the general educational system should therefore be re-assessed. A feasibility study should be done to determine the most effective and achievable route to follow given the socio-cultural context and taking into account the shortcomings and potential of current offerings.

6.7 A personal perspective

Upon the conclusion of this research journey, many difficult stages had been passed through and challenging decisions made. It was only through these efforts that the aim of the study was accomplished. In the course of this research, I have become aware of factors that affect my knowledge and my susceptibility to external

influences when organising and writing up the research. In doing so, I have become more appreciative and more aware of the importance of conducting educational research of this nature. Specifically, I believe I have increased my awareness of the specific epistemological and other guiding principles that inform such research and specifically, the ways in which the experiences of participants can be interpreted.

I am now conscious of the importance of understanding differing theoretical approaches and their wider implications, such as those of the social and medical model. This was achieved by adopting an advanced degree of reflexivity and awareness throughout the analytical process of research (Frith & Kitinger, 1998; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Throughout the course of my research, I have adopted a critical approach towards these positions and interpretations by focusing on the conditions and limitations in which they were developed. I recognise these theoretical influences, therefore I was able to distance myself and critically assess my role in the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Before I conducted this study, I felt that my knowledge and understanding was limited. In some ways, I believe my approach towards the underlying issues of the study lacked depth and could be considered simplistic. Furthermore, I took the current situation for granted and these issues formed some of the critical ingredients of who I was as a person and how I performed as a teacher. The research process has encouraged me to change my perspectives on both reality and truth; as such I feel that I am now better equipped to critically examine my own actions in general and to teaching in particular. The heavy workload involved in the study resulted was

also a learning experience. I found the study taxing both emotionally, physically and mentally; however, I feel that as I have learned many new skills that I never thought possible, the benefits of such sacrifices have been enormous.

Over the past six years I have learnt a great deal and have undergone a number of significant changes. The process of research has enhanced my skills as a teacher and as a researcher; as a consequence I believe I have gained a new perspective on the issues involved. I have found the process of conducting research for this study to be a significant learning-oriented experience. The fact that this was the first time that I was able to speak intensively to Kuwaiti primary teachers, thus it gave me an insight into their educational worlds that I would not otherwise have been able to access and this has, as such, allowed me to develop my own awareness and has in many different ways changed me as a teacher. It changed my understanding, my feelings and my expectations as a teacher towards children with dyslexia, but also, perhaps most significantly, towards other teachers. My experiences of this research will remain important reference points throughout my future career as an educator, in which I hope to assist in effecting some of the changes discussed in this study to build a better future for the next generations in my home country.

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Appendix 1: Papers and letters

1- School letter



Graduate School of Education

Dr Hazel Lawson
Graduate School of Education
University of Exeter
Tel: +44(0) 1392 722874
Email: H.A.Lawson@exeter.ac.uk

Reem Altamimi
PhD candidate
University of Exeter
Tel: +965 99790035
Email: ra278@exeter.ac.uk

Dear

I am currently at the University of Exeter studying for a PhD which intends to investigate the extent to which primary school teachers, dyslexic students and their parents share an understanding of the concept of dyslexia, and the implications of such understanding for the identification of, and forms of support provided for, children with dyslexia in Kuwaiti primary schools. The purpose of this study is to examine issues relating to identification, support and understanding dyslexia in the Kuwaiti primary school. The resulting report will be in the form of a thesis for examination, and will, I hope, inform developments of understanding dyslexia in Kuwait and add the perspective of the participants to the current debate around dyslexia.

With this in mind I would like to ask if I might visit your school this term [in April-May] to carry out a small, but important aspect of my research. As a teacher myself, I am well aware of the workload that all the teachers have to cope with and want to take up as little as possible of teachers' time. I would like, if possible, to undertake the following:

- 1) Identify class (es) with children experiencing a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia). Gain parental permission to observe the children during Arabic and an English lesson and to interview the child/ren.
- 2) Interview with the head teacher
- 3) Visit classroom to observe the interaction and form of support provided for children with dyslexia (but not, of course, to assess or evaluate teachers' practice) –one Arabic lesson and one English lesson
- 4) Interview with two teachers (Arabic and English) following the observations
- 5) Informal interview with child/ren with dyslexia, whilst undertaking a drawing activity
- 6) Interview with parents of child with dyslexia.

Naturally, I will observe ethical guidelines in dealing with teachers and participants to ensure that everyone who takes part does so willingly. The research has been given an ethical approval certificate from the University of Exeter. I can also assure you that no data will be passed to anyone in the school or the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the school, individual teachers and children will not be identified, thus ensuring confidentiality.

If you require any further information about specific aspects of my research related to the above, or the research more generally, please feel free to contact either myself, or my supervisor Dr Hazel Lawson, whose details are included at the head of this letter. I will be happy to come to your school to answer any queries you might have and, if you consider it appropriate, to confirm possible arrangements in more detail. I should be very grateful to be allowed to carry out this research in your school.

Yours sincerely,

Reem Altamimi

2- Parental Letter and invitation to interview



Graduate School of Education

To all parents of pupils in Year 5

As part of a PhD research project, Reem Altamimi will be spending some time over coming weeks taking part in lessons with Year ..., looking at the experiences of the whole year in general and of dyslexic pupils in particular. The next stage of the research will involve informal interviews with children and members of staff, parents if available. The interviews with the students are planned for the week beginning and will take place over the lunch breaks each day that week.

The children have been informed in general terms of the reasons for the research. They will be invited to take part in interviews and have the right to refuse to participate whenever and for whatever reason they wish.

Every effort will be made to ensure that information is confidential; neither the school nor any individuals will be identified in the final report. Data gathering devices such as digital voice recorders will only be used with the permission of the children.

If you have any concerns or questions about the research, Mrs Altamimi will be happy to discuss the project in more detail. She can be contacted either via a message at the school or by email: ra278@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Observation guidance sheetClassroom Observation:

Date:

Student name: ----- Grade level: -----

Class: ----- Teacher name: -----

Time: -----

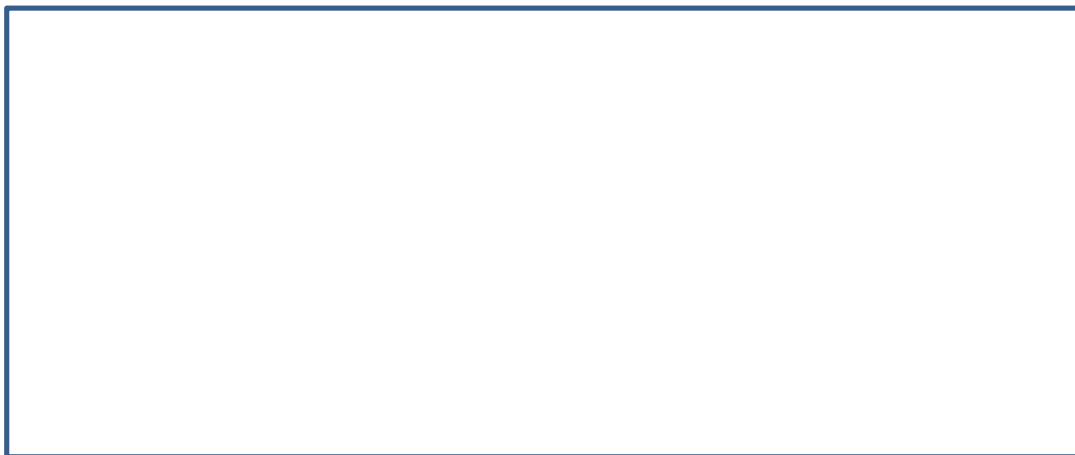
Number of pupils: -----

Part 1: Class environment:

- What is the environment in the classroom:

- What is the place of the lesson?

Classroom layout.



- What activity or class is being observed?(At the beginning of the lesson- during the lesson...)

Part 2: Dyslexic student's participation

- What is the learning participation of students with dyslexia?
Competitive - active - involved – none
- What is the students' behavior during the lesson?
- How does the student interact in the classroom?
Are they doing deferent or a same activity
- What is their level of independence?
Fully independent - some independence - some assistance - fully assisted
- Is the student engaged with the lesson or activity-asking questions, focused?
- What kind of support does the student receive?

Part 3: Teacher's practice:

- Teaching strategies
Instructional strategies for teaching children with dyslexia:
- Language
Speaks slowly and clearly. Use short sentences – Repeat key words. Varies tone of voice.
- Giving Instructions
Instructions are clear and one at a time. Ask pupil to repeat back to check

understanding.

Stresses key words.

- Writing And Copying From The Board

Reads aloud as s/he writes. Uses coloured pens. Does not stand where obstructing view. Tries to avoid pupils copying from the board where possible . Allows plenty of time to complete. Gives pupils a copy of what is on the board .Gives typed photocopies rather than copying.

- Reading

Checks suitability of texts – may need to simplify. Does not ask the pupil to read aloud (unless she/he wants to). Read instructions to the pupil where appropriate. Encourages paired reading.

- Promoting self esteem

Valuing the individual and their diversity. Prizes for effort and achievement in all areas.

Promoting strengths. Providing opportunities for success and providing a stress free learning environment.

Appendix 3: Teacher interview

Name:

Date:

Place of interview:

Time started:

Time finished:

Interview Questions:

- How many years have you spent in the teaching services?
- How long you have been involved in teaching a pupil with Dyslexia?
- Do you have any additional qualifications related to the education of pupils with special educational needs?

Teachers' perceptions of dyslexia

- When, where and how did you first hear about dyslexia?
- Can you explain what you understand by the term 'dyslexia'?
- Can you describe the characteristics of a dyslexic child?
- How did you acquire your knowledge about dyslexia? (in your initial teacher training or on in-service training or through your own reading and your experience with students with dyslexia)? What do you think of your training?
- What is the school policy/ approach regarding dyslexia?
- What are the guidelines for meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia in your whole school key policy documents?
- Are you confident about identifying dyslexia? Yes/no? Why?
- Are you confident teaching students with dyslexia? Yes/no? Why?

Inclusion

- Tell me about the inclusion of children with dyslexia.
- What is the purpose of inclusive education?
- How do you feel about the trend towards increasing inclusion?

Identification of children with dyslexia

- How is dyslexia diagnosed in your school?
Screening methods, specialist diagnosis (medical, educational, psychological)
- What protocol takes place after the diagnosis?
Social stigma, family concerns, methods of informing the family and child, psychological help.

Processes and practices

- Can you briefly describe any advantages which having a pupil with Dyslexia has brought to your class?
- Can you briefly describe any difficulties which having a pupil with Dyslexia has brought to your class?
- What issues arise when you have a dyslexic pupil in your class? Can you give me an example?
- How do you cater for the individual needs of the dyslexic child within the classroom setting?
- Have you had to change your classroom management approaches to accommodate a pupil with Dyslexia? If yes, can you state how?

- Have you needed to make changes to your planning in order to accommodate a pupil with Dyslexia?
- Do you have to change the way you teach a lesson if you have a Dyslexic pupil in it? Tell me about it.
- What do you use to monitor the child's progress?
- What resources are available to you as a teacher to aid you in helping children with dyslexia?
- Do you receive any additional support for the children with dyslexia in your lessons?
- Do you include the support in your lesson planning?
- How do you feel about meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia?

Thank you for your Time.

Appendix 4: Headteacher/psychologist interview

School:

Place of interview:

Name:

Date:

Time started:

Time finished:

Perceptions of dyslexia

- When, where and how did you first hear about dyslexia?
- Can you explain what you understand by the term 'dyslexia'?
- Can you describe the characteristics of a dyslexic child?
- How did you acquire your knowledge about dyslexia?

Policy

- What is the school policy/ approach regarding dyslexia?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of this policy?
- Do you think this policy can succeed in creating inclusive/dyslexia friendly schools?
- Do you suggest any changes to this policy?
- Who takes part in developing school policy? Do you involve school staff and parents?
- Do you receive any feedback from schools to improve the current policy?
- Are there any organisations or parties involved in shaping the current policy?
- What are the guidelines for meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia in your whole school key policy documents?

Inclusion

- Tell me about inclusion of children with dyslexia?

- What is the purpose of inclusive education?
- How do you feel about the trend towards increasing inclusion?

Identification of children with dyslexia

- How is dyslexia diagnosed in your school?
{Screening methods, specialist diagnosis (medical, educational, psychological).
- What happens after the diagnosis?

Support

- What kind of support is provided for mainstream schools?
- Is the support valuable in schools?
- What resources are available at your school to help children with dyslexia?
- How do you feel about meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia?
- Can you describe your relationship with the parents of children with dyslexia and the other involved staff?

Dyslexia friendliness

- Have you heard about dyslexia friendly schools or dyslexia friendly teaching? When? Where?
- What do you think about this?
- Can you describe what a dyslexia friendly school might look like?
- What are the factors within the school and more widely which would facilitate the process of developing dyslexia friendly practice?
- What are the barriers to developing more dyslexia friendly schools? Are they removable?

- Are there any important or innovative practices that you could recommend to other schools interested in developing dyslexia friendly practices?
- What are the future plans?
- Would you like to add anything?

Thank you for your Time.

Appendix 5: Student interview

School:

Place of interview:

Name of child:

Date:

Time started:

Time finished:

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been coming to this school?
2. What are the things you like best about coming to this school?
3. What are you good at learning in school? Are there some things which you find difficult? What are these?
4. How do teachers help you with the things which you find hard?
5. Do teachers read important information out to the whole class so that you don't have to try to read it by yourself?
6. Are there any things which other pupils in your class do that you don't?
7. Do you need any extra help at class? Who gives you this help? What help?
8. Does someone write down your homework for you?
9. Does anyone help you with reading or writing during tests?
10. Do teachers make you read out loud in the class or only when you want to?
11. Are you doing the best schoolwork that you can?
12. Are you mostly happy at school?
13. Do you worry about school?
14. Are you proud of your work?
15. What is one thing that really helps you?
16. What is one thing that you really hate?

17. Do you find it difficult to copy from the board?
18. Do you avoid words that you can't spell when you're writing?
19. Do you have time to finish your written work in class?
20. If you could change anything in the school to make your life better, what would it be?

Thank you for your Time.

Appendix 6: Parent interview

School:

Place of interview:

Name of child:

Date:

Time started:

Time finished:

Interview Questions

Perception and knowledge

1. How long has your son/daughter been attending this school?
2. What are your child's strengths?
3. What difficulties does your child face?
4. When and how was your child identified?
5. When, where and how did you first hear about dyslexia?
6. Can you explain what you understand by the term 'dyslexia'?
7. Can you describe what the characteristics of dyslexia are – in relation to your child?
8. Does the school say anything about dyslexia?
9. Are there any guide lines? Tell me about them..

Support

10. How do you collaborate with the class teacher? Does she inform you about your child's strengths and difficulties and what you can do to help him/her?
What does s/he tell you?
11. Can you tell me about the provision the school offers your child? Are you satisfied with it? Does s/he need anything else from the school?

12. What kind of support is important for your son/daughter in the school? How is this provided?

13. In what ways, if any, have you noticed changes in your son/daughter since s/he has been diagnosed?

14. Are there things which the school is unable to provide for your son/daughter? If yes, what are these?

15. What are your priorities for your son/daughter in educational terms?

Inclusion

16. Have you heard of 'inclusion'? Tell me about it.

17. What is the purpose of inclusive education?

18. Tell me about inclusion of pupils with dyslexia.

19. How do you feel about the trend towards increasing inclusion?

20. If you were offered a straight choice between mainstream and special school, which would you choose and why?

Dyslexia Friendly Schools

21. Have you heard of dyslexia friendly schools or dyslexia friendly teaching? When? Where?

22. Can you describe what a dyslexia friendly school might look like?

23. Would you like to add anything?

Thank you for your Time.

Appendix 7: Consent form



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM**Understanding Dyslexia: implications of the identification of and support for children with dyslexia in Kuwaiti primary schools**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me
- Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.
- All information I give will be treated as confidential.
- The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

.....
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher: 00965 99790035

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Dr Hazel Lawson
Graduate School of Education
University of Exeter
Tel: +44(0) 1392 722874
Email: H.A.Lawson@exeter.ac.uk


OR

Reem Altamimi
PhD candidate
University of Exeter
Tel: +965 99790035
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.....
Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 8: Power Point Presentation

Who am I?



My name is Reem ALTAMIMI

Studying at the University of Exeter



In Great Britain UK



**What am I doing here?
research**



Why here?



I am interested in Kuwaiti primary schools.

Why Year 5?

Oldest – full choice of subjects

- **What will I be doing?**
- Observation – not teaching.
- Individual interviews with some children.
- **When will I be doing it?**
- Last two weeks of Easter term and first two of Summer for in-class and (April- May)

How will I record?



Anonymity
Avoid anything that would identify individuals

Thank you for your time

Appendix 9: Coded interview

Interview with the teacher of Arabic Language in Al-Sedrah school, Mrs Faten

Q1: Could you please introduce yourself?

A: Faten, Arabic language teacher, Al-Sedrah school. I teach the year 5 pupils. My years of service are: 5 years in Jordan, 2 years in this school of specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and 5 years in state schools. I have 12 years of service, seven of them in Kuwait.

Q2: What is your experience in specific learning difficulties/dyslexia?

A: My experience is here in Kuwait. I am an Arabic language teacher. I used to teach year 1 primary pupils. We have been selected by the inspectors because we are teachers with patience and highly skilled. The aim was to provide us with the training to carry out our job at the model schools for SpLD.

Q3: How did you become qualified to teach children with SpLD or dyslexia?

A: In the beginning when they (the local authority) selected us, we didn't have any awareness about these cases or this group, the teaching methods used or how to deal with students with specific learning difficulties or how to treat them. Accordingly, three months before the students' arrival we received concentrated training in the school. We learned about all related materials. Then I was able to answer any related questions when asked about learning difficulties.

Q4: What are these training courses?

A: There are a lot of them. At the first they explain about what a child with learning difficulties is. Then they demonstrate the tests for you to carry out on a child to diagnose him or her as having learning difficulties. And to deal with children with any kind of SpLD.

In the past we didn't know that a lack of learning could be due to these learning difficulties caused by dyslexia. We used to say that this child is either lazy or unwilling to do any work or makes an effort.

They (CCET) gave us materials to help us perform the tests and information about the nature of the difficulties in general, also how we can deal with such difficulties and how to treat affected students in all subjects, including Arabic, English and Mathematics. In general we developed some experience and we came to this school with excitement and pleasure that we are going to do something good for our pupils, who are in need of our assistance. We joined the school before the children arrived, so we could be there ready to deal with them.

We also attended workshops on how to prepare and use the available facilities for the benefit of the Students with learning difficulty.

Q5: When was the first time you heard about dyslexia?

A: When I came to Kuwait almost three years ago, I was provided with some background knowledge after attending a conference in connection with the Inclusion project.

Q6: How would you explain or describe dyslexia?

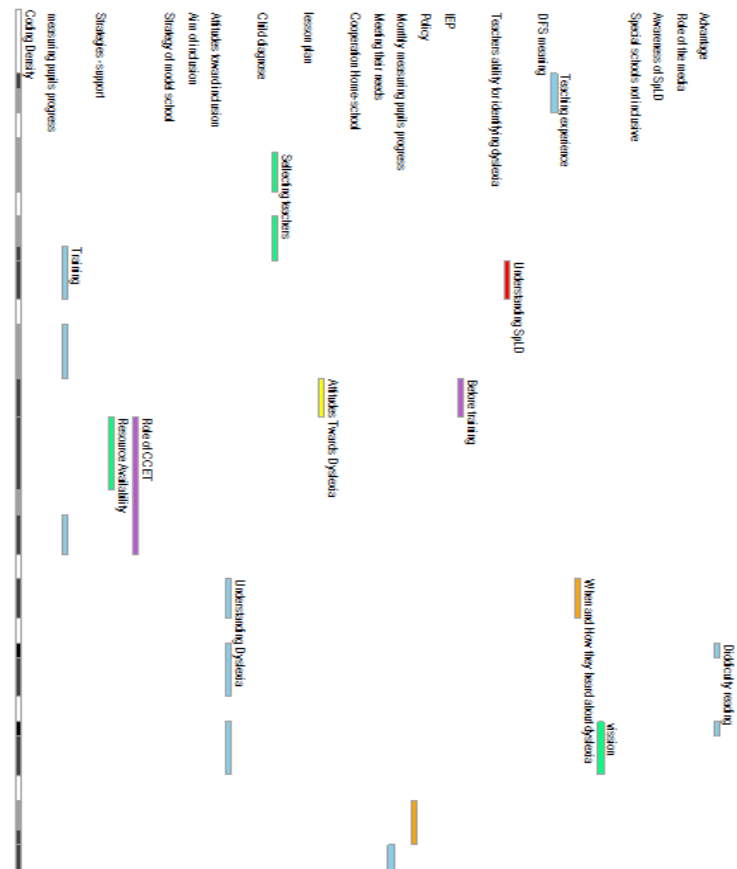
A: A child who has a number of difficulties; most of them are related to his ability to read. However, if we try to overcome these problems using approved special methods, then this child will be able to get rid of this difficulty.

Q7: What are the dyslexic child's characteristics and behaviours?

A: He/she has a lack of fluency in reading. Some of the words may appear missing during his reading; he might see the lines close to each other, or could see moving words or the words written back-to-front.

Q8: What is the school policy regarding dyslexia/ SpLD?

A: There is a document. The head teacher has provided us with seminars in which to explain this document, such as its contents and how to practise following the guidance – and we have to follow the exact details of this guidance. There is a yearly school plan, so we have to be able to know everything step by step. There is also an analysis of the percentages for each class, measuring the progress made.



by the students monthly. We usually have discussions with the head teacher about the curve and trends of this curve, together with these percentages.

In the past at our previous schools, we didn't have these discussions. They didn't show us things like this. Now we feel that we are part of the educational system/process.

Q9: What are the what are the basic principles for satisfying the dyslexic child's needs?

A: What happens in our schools is not done in other schools. One to one classes provide what the child needs in the essential subjects or their foundations. We insist on giving them these basic materials because they are the foundations to any subjects. These are like private classes, though they take place within the group classes. Also, class density (the number of students in a class) has a great impact. Our classes are no larger than 10 students. However, those ten pupils take more effort to teach than normal students; with lower numbers you can attend to them one by one (Multi-Sensory)

Q10: Do you have the ability to discover which children have dyslexia?

A: Yes I have, thanks be to Allah, with the cooperation from this school. Before that, the answer to your question would have been 'No'. I didn't have any basis or foundations, rules or guidance to support me. We used to make general judgements, as anyone would without any background in the subject.

Q11: Why?

A: Because the training courses were consolidated with practical work. We worked with the children themselves, experiencing factual cases.

Q12: What do you think of including students with dyslexia in mainstream schools?

A: Limited Inclusion maybe which means a reduction of the number of students in class, and including one or two of those children with learning difficulty. That is fine, but to include them in these normal classes, as is the case now, is not beneficial for the children. The teacher cannot follow their work, as he or she could not give them the attention they deserve with only Limited Inclusion.

Q13: What are Inclusion's objectives?

A: There are parents do not like their children to be in specific learning difficulties schools, but with Inclusion schools they will be looked after, without letting them feel that he or she is labelled as learning difficulty. In other words, Inclusion reduces the social impact on the child of having learning difficulty. The other motivation for it is that the specialised comprehensive schools require large budgets and offer less capacity.

Inclusion reduces this and the children can find places that accept them and treat them kindly with respect to their situations and requirements.

Q14: Do you agree with the increase in Inclusion schools?

A: I have not tried the Inclusion schools but our experience here with students with learning difficulties it is quite good and successful. I wish it to be repeated.

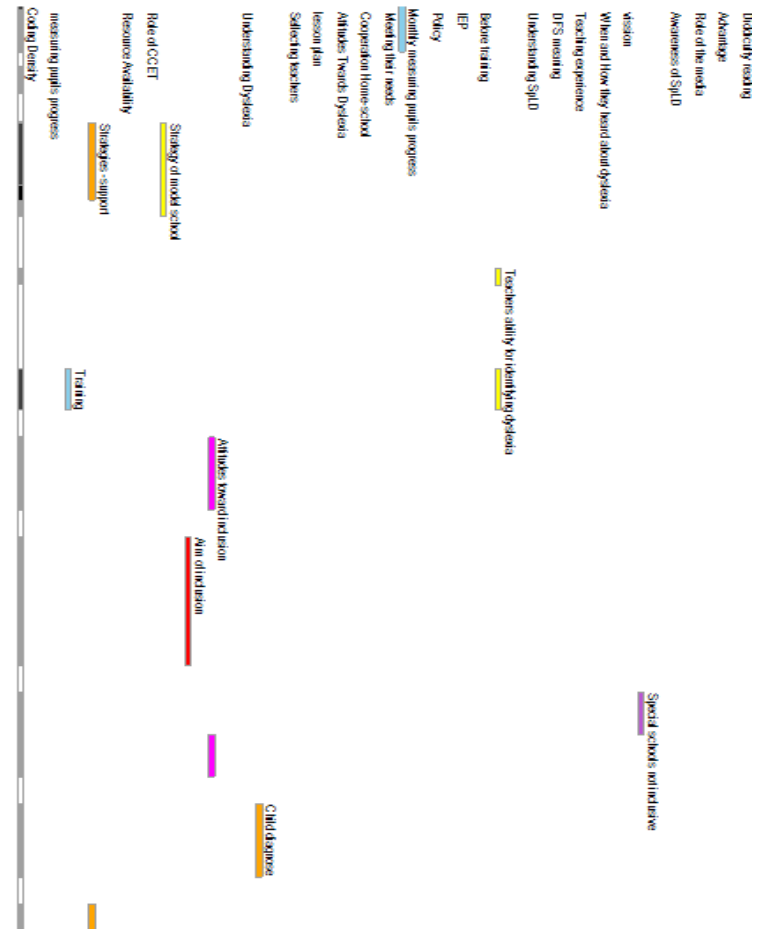
If Inclusion provides good and valuable results for children with learning difficulties then why not? But if it is the opposite, then "No".

Q15: Tell me about the diagnosis of your students?

A: All the cases have already been diagnosed. First, there is a form to be completed by the teacher and sent to the CCET to be sorted by their specialists. After that the child will be submitted to different types of tests. After the diagnosis, I don't know whether they produce a certificate confirming that he has learning difficulty. We receive- accept the child according to this diagnosis.

Q16: Have you changed your methods or class management?

A: According to me, and because I used to teach the Year1, primary, it doesn't make a big difference, because the year1 students don't have any prior learning background, and they need to practice one



has to provide them with the foundations or principles, as they do not know the letters and how to read. My role in this case is to establish these principles in order to get good results.

Here, the case is different, because my class now are year 5 pupils. I have used the same procedures that I used with the first class pupils, but my judgment is that students have learning difficulties, and not that they are trouble makers or lazy.

Q17: Have you changed your preparation of the teaching subjects or lessons?

A: Yes, our way of providing objectives has to be more suitable for learning difficulty children. There are objectives that can't be satisfied so we increase those objectives the objectives we think the pupil needs. Also, in our preparation (plan) of the questions, we have to decide which student could answer a specific question.

Q18: How do you measure the children's progress?

A: From different things, such as an individual's reading, understanding the lesson when I explain to the class, his response and dictation. When you find the child's dictation improves, then you can know that your efforts have been successful. In addition to the improvements in their reading, some of the children in the past didn't know how to use letters; they know now how to read and write these letters.

We use records. When we receive a student, we carry out an initial survey to measure his knowledge. This is a periodic process in the Arabic Language classes. It involves a survey of dictation and comprehension. Then, after the first period of teaching we carry out another test, to see if there is any progress in his level. All this information is recorded and according to this we design a therapy or educational plan.

Q19: Who shares in the preparation of this educational plan?

A: No one, I do the plan (the class teacher).

Q20: Does the child contribute to your preparation of the objectives?

A: No.

Q21: What facilities, applications, methods and support methods or programmes are provided?

A: When we were selected to teach children with learning difficulties, they told us that they were going to provide equipment, support facilities and teaching packages for us. When we came in we established this school ourselves. We felt that we were doing this for ourselves and this gave us piece of mind. The difference in salary the difference is only small compared to the normal teachers. It is KD40 (£85), but we don't care. Also, the head teacher always tries to minimise the burden on our shoulders. It is our desire to provide something good for these children.

Q22: Are the needs of children with dyslexia met at the school?

A: The children are happy and they wish to stay in this school. There are beautiful and nice technical teaching facilities. Also, the children feel that they were neglected in their previous schools, but here they have all the attention concentrated to them.

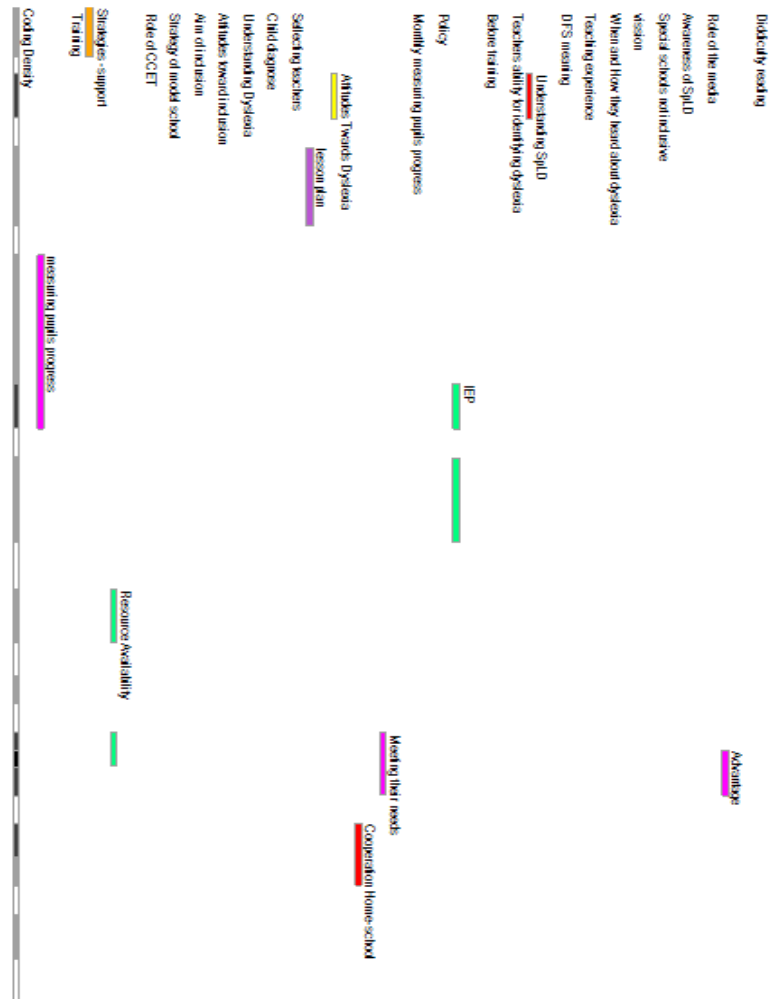
Q23: What is the nature of the school's relationship with the parents?

A: Excellent, we have mothers among the school community who consider themselves as members of the school family. But on the other hand there are some mothers who do not follow. We don't know, it could be family issues or problems, but we do not depend on the families in our work.

Q24: Have you heard about dyslexia friendly schools?

A: Here in Kuwait? Is there any?., what are they and what are their objectives, are they the same as UK?

Q25: What would you say are their properties; what does the name mean to you?



A: Like normal schools, managing the Inclusion of this group. The friendship concept is good, also the name is not bad for the families, there might seem welcoming. I see it as a good idea.

Q26: What are the barriers to developing our schools to be more friendly or more inclusive?

In term of finance, there isn't any problems here in Kuwait, but what we need is to Increase peoples awareness and explain to them more about this group of children, such as through TV, training, seminars, radio, etc. That was the most important objective to us in the opening of this school.

Q27: What are your future plans?

A: To provide methods like projects, drawings; also simplifying the text and doing everything beneficial for the child.

Q28: Do you have anything else to add?

A: Thank you.

I thank you, too.

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| Difficulty reading | |
| Advantages | |
| Role of the media | |
| Awareness of SpLD | |
| Special schools - not inclusive | |
| vision | |
| When and how they heard about dyslexia | |
| Teaching experience | |
| D.F.S. meaning | |
| Understanding SpLD | |
| Teachers ability for identifying dyslexia | |
| Before training | |
| IEP | |
| Policy | |
| Monthly measuring pupils' progress | |
| Meeting their needs | |
| Cooperation Home-school | |
| Attitudes Towards Dyslexia | |
| Lesson plan | |
| Selecting teachers | |
| Child diagnose | |
| Understanding Dyslexia | |
| Attitudes toward inclusion | |
| Aim of inclusion | |
| Strategy of model school | |
| Role of G.C.E.T | |
| Resource Availability | |
| Strategies - support | |
| Training | |
| measuring pupils' progress | |
| Coding Difficulty | |